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WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

(MRS. ROSS CHURCH),

AUTHORESS OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "TOO GOOD FOR HIM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

RACHEL'S FLIGHT.

By the time that Rachel Norreys had passed through the gates of Abbey Lodge into the broad thoroughfare beyond, the October afternoon had subsided into a foggy evening, and the lamps of London were alight. My heroine had not left her home with none but vague and misty notions floating through her brain, unknowing whether she intended roaming the streets all night, or sitting down on the first doorstep that she came across. People in the nineteenth century never do. Such incidents only suit romances of

a past date; and we, who now live, are too much creatures of habit to be guided entirely by impulse when events of importance depend upon our actions. We have been too much used to lie down in our beds as night returns, and in all other respects to suit ourselves to the requirements of the civilized society we move in, to contemplate for a moment outraging its laws by anything so egregiously romantic as the above.

Rachel had come to the determination to leave her home very suddenly, but not so suddenly as to prevent her having, in the meanwhile, fully formed the plans she intended to pursue. Cabs and railway stations were no novelties to her, and she had little fear of journeying alone. Her object was to go to the Court, and there see Cecil Craven; and, with that end in view, Waterloo Station must first be gained. And so, when her feet were turned away from the iron gate with that passionate plaint upon her lips, they were set in the direction of Knightsbridge and the Strand. She was so far beside herself

that she did not at first think of hailing a cab, although the driver of every empty one that passed, implored her, with frantic gestures of his whip, to take a seat inside it. But the foggy air was cool and refreshing to her inflamed and heated face, and her head was full of bitter, miserable thoughts, which prevented her taking any heed to the failing of her feet and her increasing fatigue, but hurried her onwards towards her destination. Two ladies returning home in a brougham caught a glimpse of her drooping figure as it passed hastily beneath the lamplight, and the younger of the two had let down the misty glass, and looked after it as she said:

"There's a lady walking along the pavement, mamma, so like Rachel, and in mourning, too." And her companion had replied:

"My dear Christine, what a nonsensical idea!—as if Rachel would be out at this time of night, and alone;" for the fast-descending darkness made six o'clock seem almost night; and so the failing figure

passed away into the gloom, and was forgotten, and the brougham rolled on towards the Abbey Lodge.

But Rachel Norreys was not fated to reach the Waterloo Station that evening unobserved. Martha Wilson next, returning from her very unsatisfactory errand, met the black-robed lady in the shadows, and, turning to look after her, marked something familiar in her hurried step, and followed her until the next tell-tale lamp disclosed—for Rachel wore no veil—the familiar features also.

"It *is* my mistress," soliloquized Martha, with amazement. "What on earth can she be doing here alone!"

For such an occurrence had never taken place since Martha entered service at the Abbey Lodge—that either of the young ladies should thread the streets unattended. Mrs. Norreys would have been shocked at such a proposition even in broad daylight; but dark, and with the lamps lit, Martha, when she thought of it, could scarcely believe that her eyes were not playing her a trick.

"It *can't* be Mrs. Raymond," she said, as she passed her hand over the offending members; "and yet it must be, for I'd know her walk amongst a thousand, and I saw her face just now as plain as day. Anyway, I must satisfy myself, for it's the most curious thing I've come across for ever so long."

And with this intention, Martha retraced her steps, and followed quickly in the track of Rachel's retreating form. In the meanwhile she, wholly unheeding who should see or follow her, was only conscious that her limbs were failing, and that she could not walk much further. And once roused to noticing the fact, she discovered that she was very tired indeed, not being used to much walking, and that she had already taxed her strength almost beyond its powers. She had reached New Brompton by this time, and was near a cab-stand.

"How stupid of me not to have taken a cab at once," she thought, as she held up her hand. "I should have saved myself so much fatigue, and perhaps I have lost a train by the neglect. To the Waterloo

Station," she said, as she jumped into it full of the latter fear, "and drive as quickly as you can."

But before the man had time to put her desire into execution, a head was thrust into the cab window, and the voice of Martha Wilson said :

"Mrs. Norreys, ma'am, please where are you going to ?"

The sound of her familiar voice seemed to rouse Rachel from a waking dream. She stared at the girl's sympathetic face for one moment, and gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure.

"May I come too, ma'am ?" asked Martha, emboldened by the sound.

"Yes, yes !" said Rachel, hastily ; and as soon as the words had left her lips her servant was on the opposite seat to her, and they were rattling over the stones of Knightsbridge towards the station.

As Rachel had traversed those streets, alone and in the darkness, she had seemed to herself to be so utterly cut off from all with whom she had hitherto associated, that the sudden and unexpected appearance of

Martha had come as a prestige that she still belonged, and should some day return, to them. But the next moment she recalled her intended destination and her purpose, and, remembering that she had not wished to leave a trace behind her of where she had retreated, felt sorry that she had allowed Martha to accompany her even part of the way. So she sat silent until she reached the station, leaning back in the dark cab, and rendering even the shadows on her face invisible; and it was not the servant's part to break the reserve her mistress chose to maintain between them. But when they had arrived at Waterloo, and were about to descend upon the platform, Rachel said hurriedly, putting money into the other's hand:

"Martha, I am going into the country on business for a few days, and I do not want you to accompany me any further; so take this money, drive home in this same cab, and pay and dismiss the man at the Abbey Lodge. You will hear all about me to-morrow."

But there was a wildness in her eye—a

hurried, tremulous cadence in her voice—an ill-concealed agitation pervading her whole address—which told her servant that there was something wrong. She received the money with thanks (it was a sovereign), and suffered her mistress to depart into the station, under the imagination that she was about to comply with her wishes; but when she was fairly lost to view, Martha paid the cabman his fare to Waterloo, and bade him drive away.

"There are plenty more cabs for me to return to Brompton in," she thought to herself, "when I am sure that my mistress isn't coming to any harm. I can't make it out at all. I left her right enough this afternoon, to my thinking, but there's something gone wrong now, or my name's not Martha. And she's been too good lately, bless her! to let me feel comfortable unless I'm sure that she is so too. I must speak to her again before she starts, and make sure that it is all right."

But Martha's settlement with the cabman out of an unchanged sovereign, and her subsequent soliloquy and fear of following

her mistress too soon, had kept her longer than was necessary upon the outer platform; for Rachel, on entering the station, had found a crush of people waiting to get their tickets, and, on inquiry, had ascertained that the half-past six train for Weybridge was about to start immediately.

"Any luggage, miss?" the porter had asked in addition. "You had better get your ticket, for the bell will ring directly."

And so when Martha followed her, the station was comparatively empty, and Rachel was already seated in the railway carriage. The girl had guessed her mistress meant Weybridge, by "the country," for she knew that she had lately come to England, and had not many friends, and so her first inquiry of the first man she encountered, was:

"Is the Weybridge train gone, sir?"

"Not yet," was the answer; "but just moving;" and Martha rushed upon the platform as he spoke.

Rachel's head was thrust out of the carriage window, as if she had almost expected her; but, in reality, she was bidding a

mental farewell to the place which was her husband's home. Martha was by the side of the moving train, directly:

"Ma'am!" she exclaimed. "You've taken me so of a sudden, and you've said so little, that I feel quite frightened, and don't know what to think! When will you be back, ma'am, please?

"I don't know," exclaimed Rachel, in her parting agitation. "I am not sure;" and then (with a sudden thought of the pain she would cause them at the Lodge by her flight, and unknown destination), she exclaimed, "Tell them at home, that I shall be quite safe—that I am gone to Mrs. Craven's,"—and then the engine gave a hoarse shriek, and the station and Martha were things of the past.

"It can make no difference," thought Rachel, as she lay back wearily upon the cushion, "if they know where I am gone or not. Raymond is too proud to reclaim me, until I wish to return to him, and that will be probably—never— Never, now, at all events, until I bear an unblemished name, and *he* asks me to do so."

And as the remembrance of her rejected offer returned to poor Rachel's mind she coloured with her shame and misery—and closed her eyes lest the other passengers might read her story in their troubled depths. But her last words to Martha on the platform, had satisfied that young woman, that something *was* wrong, as she had suspected.

"*Tell them at home*," she repeated to herself, as the long line of carriages left the station. "Then they don't know at the Lodge, as Mrs. Raymond is travelling alone, that's evident; and it must be something very out of the common to take her away at this time of night. At home! No, they must find it out at home, the same way I have, by using their senses—for my place is to follow her. It's nothing to me, now, if mother, or all the world knows where I am; and she's been too good to me, she has, for me to desert her, when she will want me, most likely. Why, lor! she may have gone clean out of her senses—it looks like it when she goes tearing about the country like mad. Anyway, I'll be

with her, at Weybridge, to-night, even if she sends me back to the Lodge, to-morrow. Please, which is the next train to Weybridge?" she inquired of one of the officials near.

"Quarter-past seven," he replied, and for three-quarters of an hour, Martha paced the platform, or sat in the second class waiting-room, puzzling her brain for some satisfactory reason of her young mistress's sudden flight and mysterious silence.

And Rachel, meanwhile, wrapt in her own misery, was flying onwards, to the Weybridge station. It was half-past seven when she arrived there; but there was no lack of vehicles to take her to the Court.

"I shall find them all at dinner," she thought to herself, as the hired carriage turned into the drive-gates, and rattled up the long avenue. "I must ask to speak to Cecil, alone, first, for I could not tell the wretched story before Mrs. Craven."

But when the fly drew up before the portico of the house itself, and Rachel looked out eagerly, although she knew not why—she was surprised to see that the

Court was wrapped in darkness, and that there were little signs of life about it.

"They must have gone out to dinner, somewhere," was her first idea, as the fly-man's summons was answered by a maid-servant, with a flaring candle. There were plenty of men-servants left in the house, but they were having a late dinner in the lower regions with a few choice friends, and therefore the answering of the door-bell was left to Martha's successor, or any one else who would take the trouble to do it.

"Is Mrs. Craven gone out?" was Rachel's first inquiry.

"Nobody's to home," was the uncouth reply.

"Where are they gone to?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'll send somebody," and the girl and her candle disappeared together, leaving Rachel and the flyman, for about ten minutes, in total darkness.

"Don't appear as if any one was alive about here," was that gentleman's jocular remark, as he leant his hand upon the window-sash, and smiled confidentially at

his fare. He thought there seemed a good chance of making a double business of it, and taking her back to the station again. But the ten minutes were over at last, and then the housekeeper, hearing there was a lady enquiring for Mrs. Craven, did Rachel the honour to bring herself up-stairs:

"Lor, Mrs. Norreys!" she exclaimed, "who'd have thought of seeing you, ma'am? The stupid gal said as 'twas a lady of middle age. I hope nothing's gone wrong at Brompton, ma'am. I suppose you know as Mrs. Craven is down at Brighton, for a few weeks?"

"No, indeed, I did not," said poor Rachel, feeling how awkward her appearance there, without the support of the family, must seem.

"Is Major Craven at Brighton, also, or with his regiment?"

"Major Craven was here only yesterday, ma'am, to fetch a few things of his ma's which he was to take to Brighton for her, and he went, I believe, this morning. But he told me he was going to bring some friends here, for shooting, the day after

to-morrow. So perhaps he is back at the camp by this time. You wished to see Mrs. Craven, ma'am?"

"Yes—I want to speak to her and Major Craven, on business," replied Rachel, her spirits at their very lowest ebb. "I suppose I should be almost certain of catching Major Craven at Brighton to-morrow?"

"Well, ma'am, I can't say, I'm sure, not knowing. Will you sleep here, to-night, ma'am?"

And the housekeeper did not look as if she seconded the proposal very warmly—"The house was clear of all noosances, thank 'evin, for the present, and she didn't want to be fussing over Mrs. Norreys—nor any one else," as she hospitably observed, when she returned to her co-mates. And Rachel remembered that she had brought no luggage; and shrank from the exposure, which the knowledge of that fact would render inevitable; and so she tried to answer briskly, that she had no such intention, and indeed only came to see Mrs. or Major Craven. And then, having procured their seaside address, she wished Mrs.

Watson good-night," and told the flyman to drive back again; but once outside the gates, she bethought her of her friend Elise Arundel. Her cottage was close at hand—it was better she should go there for the night, than to an inn, and Elise, she was sure, would be glad to see her. Caroline Wilson was there, certainly, and Rachel was not desirous of meeting her just now; so sure was she of the woman's guilt; but even mixed up with that feeling came a courageous wish to confront her enemy, and boldly tax her with being the author of the anonymous letters, which had so destroyed her peace. And she would tell Elise also. Elise, who had half suspected Caroline of treachery, at Gibraltar, and who, with such convincing proofs set before her of the truth of her suspicions, would surely dismiss her from her service and have no more to do with her. And, although her friend could not help her, as far as that cruel oath bound her lips—still Elise knew she was innocent, and it would be something to tell her all her trouble, and to hear her say so.

And so the flyman was ordered to drive to Laburnum Cottage. But here the same want of success seemed to pursue poor Rachel; for the cottage too was very dark, and repeated ringings at the bell only brought an old woman with weak eyes to the door, who appeared to know nothing, except that Mrs. Arundel was not at home —down by the sea somewhere, she had heard, with the lady from over there (her palsied head indicating Craven Court, as she spoke); but she wasn't sure. Miss Emily was gone too, any way.

"And where is Mrs. Wilson?" Rachel next asked.

"Mrs. Wilson was gone out to tea somewhere, she believed—or into the town. She couldn't say. She'd been up to London yesterday — maybe she had gone again. Would the lady walk in?"

Yes, the lady (with a dim sense of waiting till Caroline's return, and then accusing her of her double dealing) would walk in and sit down for a few minutes. Another thought had also struck Rachel upon hearing of her friend's absence: she must sleep

then at Weybridge, and she would borrow the few articles she required for the night from Mrs. Arundel's wardrobe. There could be nothing remarkable in taking such a liberty between two friends as close as she and Eliza had been; for they had often, when necessity required it, shared each other's belongings, as if they were their own. And so Rachel entered Laburnum Cottage, and desired the flyman to wait for her return, and the old woman to show her the way to Mrs. Arundel's bedroom.

"I am an old friend of your mistress," she said in explanation, "and I want to take one or two things out of her drawers. I shall leave a note for Mrs. Wilson, if she does not return before I leave, to say that I have done so."

And then the old woman, too stupid to feel astonished (she would have let one of the swell-mob in, on exactly the same terms), lighted another candle, and showed Rachel the way up to the first floor. It was a small room (as they all were), and left in the greatest disorder, for Eliza

Arundel was an essentially untidy woman, and Caroline Wilson had had apparently too much business of her own to transact since her departure, to find time to arrange her mistress's wardrobe. The bed was unmade; the toilet-table was strewn with brushes and combs, bottles and bijouterie; and piled upon the chairs were various articles of clothing, just as they had been heaped there, when taken out from the chest of drawers for Mrs. Arundel to make a selection of what she wished packed for her seaside journey. As Rachel entered and held the candle above her head, she thought that tallow dip had never flared upon a scene of greater confusion than that which met her eye, and she despaired at first of finding what she wanted. But setting down her candlestick (the old woman having deserted her, and beaten a retreat to the lower regions, whence she had been disturbed over her "drop o' tea"), Rachel commenced patiently to withdraw article after article from the piles of linen, as she searched for what she required. Even as she did so, and one or

two trifles appeared amongst them that she had herself given to her friend—a handkerchief with "Elise" elaborately embroidered in one corner; a cut-glass scent-bottle, with a gold top, and a tiny ivory-backed prayer-book, carved and gilded—the warm feelings with which she had, even until lately, regarded Mrs. Arundel, rose up afresh in Rachel's heart, as the sight of her own little offerings, thus preserved, awakened the memory of the days when they were used to be so very closely united.

"Dear Elise," she thought, "I believe she cares for me more truly than anyone else in the world. We have been rather separated of late, what with her sorrow and my new interests; but both seem passing away together, and perhaps before long we may come to be again what we have been —almost sisters."

And in the prospect of such a reunion, Rachel placed back into their places the little gifts which had emanated from herself, almost reverentially. As she did so, she moved some other item of the carelessly-arranged heap, and threw a blotting-

book upon the ground. It was a useless, gaudy blotting-book (Eliza Arundel was very partial to gaudy things)—one of those without clasp or lock, and with pockets which let out their contents upon the slightest provocation; and as it fell, every paper it contained lay scattered on the ground. Provoked at her own awkwardness, Rachel knelt upon the floor the better to collect the fallen sheets, and to replace them in their former receptacle. But with the first that she took into her hand, a loud exclamation burst from her lips, and she rose up hastily, and brought the light to bear upon the writing. Good heavens! the same—the very same, or so it looked—that Raymond had placed into her hands that day. There were the identical words, in the same characters, and even position: "To Mr. Norreys. Sir,—This comes from a friend!"

Had she then stumbled on the very proofs of Caroline Wilson's villany? Would her tongue be spared the loathsome task of accusation, and all her trouble be, to thrust these tell-tale sheets before her eyes, and

dare her to deny they were her handiwork? Excited to the last degree, Rachel gathered up the remainder of the papers, and found they were mostly duplicates, or nearly so—evidently the trials which had been made before perfection in deception had been obtained. But as she sorted them, she came upon one which had been scribbled on, perhaps in a moment of self-reproachful thought—a moment when conscience had stayed the pen, and the writer had been forced to pause in her work of falsehood, and reinforce her courage before she could proceed; and pausing thus, not knowing what she did, had let her fingers move mechanically, and write not once or twice, but a dozen times her name, and the detection to her lie, "Eliza Arundel."

Good Lord! was it possible? By all the words, the promises, the mutual kindness which had passed between them; by all the laws of friendship, the sacredness of truth, the horror and the infamy of falsehood, was it possible that her betrayer, her enemy, the one who had so basely come behind the shield of an anonymous sig-

nature, between her husband and herself, and parted them perhaps for ever, was Eliza Arundel?—the woman who had professed to be her bosom friend, the one most interested in her career; her almost sister?"

Oh! shame upon such friendship! Silence for ever on so false a tongue. Tears, and our bitterest, for such outraged womanhood!

As the conviction of the dupe she had been made, broke upon Rachel's mind, she let the papers (more truthful than their writer) fall from her lap upon the floor again, and laying down her head upon the table, cried as if her heart would break.

Sobs of strong pain, and gasps for the relief of nature, had burst from her as she stood an apparent criminal, convicted by the words of this false friend, before her husband's sight; deep sighs, and almost groans, had rent her tortured bosom as she sped along upon her solitary journey, and felt each mile so quickly traversed, took her further from him and from her home, perhaps never to return; but no such tears

had fallen from her eyes through all that day of pain, as came in showers from them now, when the thought of Eliza Arundel's treachery pressed upon her heart. They washed away before them a faith of years, a faith in all that was good and true and warm-hearted; for Rachel had loved this woman from association, although there was so little really to love or admire in her character. They had been more separate of late, because with Rachel, Love, as a passion the most potent of all feelings, had stepped between their hearts, usurping the powers of her own, and occupying her best thoughts; and when that is the case, women must expect to suffer a decrease of interest in the bosoms of their own sex. It is but right and natural it should be so, since Heaven decreed it; but still, with all that, Rachel had cared more for Mrs. Arundel than for any other female friend, and would have almost pledged her own life upon the faith of her affection.

And the work, the glance of a moment, and that moment an accidental one, had broken down all this for ever. As Rachel

leant her head upon her hands, and cried for the desolation which the truth she had discovered seemed to create in her own breast, for the lowering which her sex had suffered in her eyes, the tears seemed to wipe out everything but a sense of the great wrong which she had suffered.

When she had at last exhausted all her grief, and, outwardly calm, rose up with the blotting-book and its collected papers in her hand, the name of Eliza Arundel bore no longer the same signification to her that it had done before. Her bosom friend was melted, gone away, had never been, and she left her room prepared to seek and to confront an enemy of her own sex, to meet her as woman injured to woman injuring; and no two foes can be better matched to close with one another in the battles of life and love. Her object then was, not to meet Mrs. Wilson, lest the possession of her prize should be disputed; she therefore prepared at once to quit the cottage, and scribbling on a piece of paper that she had taken a blotting-case from Mrs. Arundel's bedroom, signed it with her name, and

left it with the old woman, to be delivered to Caroline on her return.

Then, getting once more into the waiting fly, she desired the coachman to drive her to the Railway Hotel, at Weybridge, where she could pass the night, and be ready the first thing in the morning to start for Brighton. She felt impatient with the hours of darkness for going so slowly; she could not sleep even when she had laid herself down upon a bed, but lay awake, panting for the moment when she should stand once more in the presence of Eliza Arundel, and tell her to her face that she was false.

And when, about ten o'clock that evening, Caroline Wilson, knocking for admittance at Laburnum Cottage, was met by the old woman, with the scrap of paper that Rachel had left behind her in her hand, and some garbled story in her mouth of how a young lady in black had been, and come, and gone, &c. &c., Mrs. Arundel's coadjutor turned deadly pale, and deplored her own misfortune in having been absent on that particular occasion.

"You old fool!" she exclaimed, turning upon the woman in her wrath, "what business had you to let any one go into the bedroom, say what they would? The very blotting-book, I declare, with the identical papers in it! A nice scrape I shall get into when Mrs. Arundel comes to hear of it, and with Wilson also, for the matter of that. There'll be a regular blow-up between them all; and why on earth I didn't pack the things away days ago, I can't imagine. But who was to think of Mrs. Norreys herself coming down upon us! Well, it's a kind of fate, I suppose, and I may consider this situation as good as gone for ever."

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

But at this juncture a vociferous peal at the hall-bell upset Mrs. Wilson in the midst of her cogitations, and made her grow paler still.

"I hope it isn't Mrs. Norreys come back again," she exclaimed; for, alarmed as she was at the turn affairs had taken, she was far more afraid of meeting the injured Rachel than even of encountering her infuriated mistress, such a coward had the knowledge of her share in the foul business made of her. And, therefore, having desired the old woman once more to answer the bell, and learn what was wanted at that hour of night, it was even greater joy to

Caroline Wilson than it would otherwise have been, to hear the somewhat coarse tones of her daughter Martha inquiring if she were at home.

"Martha, my girl," exclaimed the mother, flying down the staircase, and drawing her daughter into the warm passage, "is it really you? What brings you back to-night, my dear? Where have you been? Are you married? Oh, Martha, what a turn you've given me!"

And here Caroline Wilson, beneath the influence of almost the only admirable trait in her character, broke down, and was unable to proceed. But Martha answered none of her questions.

"Has my mistress been here?" were all the words that broke from her eager lips.

"Your mistress, child?" ejaculated her mother. "Who is your mistress, and what makes you come asking for her here?"

"Mrs. Raymond Norreys," replied Martha; "and I've followed her from London to-night. Is she in this house, mother?"

"And is that all you've got to say to me,

Martha child, on first meeting," said Mrs. Wilson, reproachfully, "when you've led me such dances to find out your whereabouts, and made me fret more than enough into the bargain?"

"Lor, mother, I'm very sorry, I'm sure," returned the girl, giving her a hasty kiss; "but, here, I've just arrived by the train, and walked every step from the inn; lost my way twice, too, and all to find my young mistress; and so you can't be surprised that I'm anxious to have my questions answered first."

"Well, she *has* been here, Martha, but I didn't see her, being out, and she's been gone again a matter of an hour or more; and I can't tell you anything further."

"What did she come here for? to see Mrs. Arundel?"

"I suppose so."

"And where is Mrs. Arundel?"

"At Brighton, along with the Court people."

"Are they all gone too?" exclaimed Martha. "Then you may depend on it Mrs. Raymond has followed them, or is

going to, and I must be back to Weybridge."

And she almost looked as if she intended to put her design into execution at once; but here her mother interposed, and justly. There could be no train to Brighton that night, and Mrs. Norreys was not likely to go by it, if there were. She would most probably sleep at Weybridge, and travel southward on the next morning.

Martha saw the sense of this, and agreed to stay the night at Laburnum Cottage with her mother.

But this point being settled, and the prodigal daughter led into the kitchen, and there set before a comfortable supper-table, her thoughts, instead of fixing themselves upon her mother, and the good things before her, would fly back to her absent employer.

"If I could only be sure now where Mrs. Raymond is, and what she is a going to do," she said, meditatively, and with utter disregard of the heaped-up plate before her, "I should feel so much easier."

But here Mrs. Wilson lost patience. They

were alone now, the old woman having returned to her own home, and the mother was dying with impatience to hear the whole account of Martha's adventures since they had parted—the reason for her leaving the Court in so mysterious a manner, no less than by what strange course of events she came to call Mrs. Raymond Norreys her mistress, for this last circumstance grated strangely upon Mrs. Wilson's feelings whenever she heard it mentioned.

"Lor bless me, Martha!" she exclaimed, pettishly; "can't you be forgetting Mrs. Raymond Norreys for half an hour, and talk of something else? She's no favourite of mine, as you have often heard, and I can't say I call it pretty behaviour in you to have engaged yourself into such a family, and without saying a word to me upon the subject first; but now you've had the grace to think of coming back to your mother, you might give her a little news of yourself, instead of letting your tongue run on about a young person that I certainly never liked, and have no great opinion of."

Martha Wilson's black eyes flashed at

this uncommendatory mention of her absent benefactress. She was passionate and self-willed, but she had a large bump of gratitude, and in this instance she cultivated the virtue.

"No great opinion of her, haven't you?" she echoed, rather coarsely. "Then let me tell you, mother, that you'd better not say those words before me again, or perhaps I shall say something that you would rather not hear. No great opinion, indeed! Why, Mrs. Raymond Norreys is the sweetest and best and kindest young lady as ever I came across, and I'd lay down my life for her, that I would," reiterated the excited girl, as she brought down her heavy hand upon the deal table. "Now, look here, mother," she continued, turning away from her untasted food and speaking as if she intended to be not only heard but believed; "it don't signify telling you now, because it's a past matter, and I don't much care who knows it, but what drove her away from Aldershot barracks is what drove me away from Craven Court, and that was being spied after when I wished to go my

own ways. It was dislike of that, and a wish for more freedom, that took me to London, and made me offer myself as lady's-maid to Mrs. Raymond Norreys, and a man was at the bottom of it all, as you may guess."

"Lor, my dear, who is he?" demanded Mrs. Wilson, interrupting her with true feminine curiosity.

"Pshaw! what signifies that?" said the girl, with a marked disdain. "You won't never know, mother, so it's no use asking; and it's got nothing to do with my story. I hadn't been in Mrs. Norrey's service long before she found out that I knew such a one, and warned me against him. I don't think she would ever have found it out of herself, bless you, she's a deal too unsuspicious; but the old lady and the other servants carried tales of me to her, and, in consequence, she told me I must give him up. She'd been so kind to me before that that I took courage to tell her the truth. No one had ever spoken to me as she had done, or I might have done the same to them. But your husband bullied me out

of the barracks, and you set yourself as a judge over me, and I'm afraid I don't bear control well, mother; and from what you've told me of yourself, I should think I had most likely caught it of you. If my mistress had tried to bully me, I should have left her service, but she spoke as if she felt for me, and I couldn't stand that."

"Does she know who you are?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"No, she doesn't," was the reply.

"Ah, if she did, you'd find it would make a difference in her."

"I don't believe it," rejoined Martha, stoutly. "She knows that I'm not the daughter of honest parents, for I told her so from the very first, and she said it only made her feel for me the more."

Caroline Wilson had shuddered as her daughter put the naked truth before her thus, but she made no remark upon it, and merely said, "Go on."

"When I told her all my trouble," resumed Martha, "what did she do? turn me out, or call me names?—neither. She set herself to work to find out who the man

was, who I had let myself be fooled into loving, for she was afraid, being a gentleman, that he wasn't a fit acquaintance for me."

"Oh! he's never a *gentleman,* Martha," exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, clasping her hands with a vivid recollection of what the acquaintanceship of gentlemen had ended in for herself.

"He *was,*" answered her daughter. "He ain't nobody now, if you mean the man I love, for he's deceived me, and I shall never see him more, if I can help it."

"Deceived you, Martha: in God's name, how?" demanded the mother, anxiously.

"Not as you seem to think, mother, though it might have been so. I think it *would* have been so, except for Mrs. Raymond Norreys—except for my young mistress and her care of me. Why, she got even Mr. Norreys to take trouble for my sake, and find out all particulars about him, until my eyes were opened, and I saw for myself that the man was playing me false, that he only wanted to ruin me, and that no good could come of it. And that's the

lady you've got no opinion of, mother. The only one as has ever drawed tears from my eyes, brought sense and reason to my help, and made me see my own danger. Would you have liked to have seen me ruined, mother? Would you have been pleased to see me come home this night, and to hear me say as I never could hold up my head again amongst honest women? Because that's what would have happened to me, most likely, before now, without it had been for the young Mrs. Norreys—for the lady as you've no opinion of. But I'd lay down my life for her, to-day, and will to-morrow, if required," repeated poor Martha, in the fulness of her gratitude.

Caroline Wilson had grown paler and paler during the course of her daughter's harangue. Here had her girl, for whose safety and well-being she was so anxious, been on the very brink of peril, and the woman who had saved her (when, as she said, no other could) had been the very one against whose peace of mind she had herself been plotting, in order to gratify the revenge of a mistress whom she despised

and cared as little for, as she did for Rachel Norreys. What would she not have given, as she sat that night listening to her daughter's recital of danger past, to have had that little note, that fragment of paper and that gold stud, once more in her own hands. But the deed was done, and not to be recalled. Good heavens! how she shivered. Was the fire lower, or had the night turned suddenly cold? Her daughter saw her agitation, and noticed it.

"You're frightened, mother," she said, "at what I've gone through, and you well may be. I'm frightened myself sometimes to look back upon it; but it's past now, thank Heaven! I've done with it to-day, and for ever. But what do you think we owe the lady who has saved me from such a fate?"

Ah, what indeed! Something better than those treacherous, cowardly letters, that damning evidence to (at the worst) an undecided guilt, that putting upon innocent words the deadliest and most shameful of constructions. But Mrs. Wilson had not the courage at once to speak of such. She

only said, in answer to her daughter's question :

"What brought your mistress here to-night, Martha?"

"That I cannot say," returned the girl, again interrupting herself in the midst of the supper she had commenced to attack. "You know as much as I do now, mother. I left her at home this afternoon about four o'clock, or thereabouts, and, as I thought, quite happy, except for me (and when she tried to give me comfort I saw the tears stand in her blessed eyes, I did)," said Martha, digging her knuckles into her own as she spoke, "and she gave me leave to go out on a little business of my own. Well, as I was returning—late for the time of year, six o'clock, very likely, and all the lamps lighted—whom should I meet but my young mistress, walking in the streets alone! Lor, mother! she *never* goes out by herself in London; they're a deal too particular over her for that. Yet there she was, hurrying along, and directly I saw 'twas her I felt sure something had happened, and I cut after her as quick as I

could, till I saw her call a cab against the Kensington Museum, and then I made bold to speak to her, and ask if I might go along with her; and she said yes; so I jumped in too, and we drove to the Waterloo Station, and then she wanted me to go back home again, saying she didn't want me; but I couldn't feel easy, so I followed her on to the platform, just as she was leaving the station in the Weybridge train, and she calls out to me from the window: 'Tell them at home that I shall be quite safe—that I am going to Mrs. Craven's.' Then I felt sure that something was wrong, and I left them at home to take care of themselves, and followed my mistress on here by the next train. And I should have caught her in this house too, and I wish I had, except for having to walk all the way in from Weybridge. What could have happened, mother, in an hour's time, to drive her out from home like that, and to distress her so; for I could see she was nearly bursting with grief. It wasn't my place to speak to her, or I could almost have asked the question, for all the kind-

ness she's shown to me. And what can make her want to see Mrs. Arundel and Mrs. Craven? What have they to do with my mistress? Can you guess? Why, my gracious! mother, what's come to you?"

She might well ask. Others, who had known Caroline Wilson all her life, would have stared, like Martha, to see her now, so strangely unlike her cold, unfeeling self, sink down upon her knees before her daughter, and bring her trembling hands before her face, to hide the blistering, repentant tears which trickled down her cheeks.

"And I've been saying all along," she sobbed, "that I could cut off my right hand to do a service for the creature as would bring you back to me, and this is the end of it! Driven from her home!—alone and suspected, and through me! Oh, Lor! shall I ever forgive myself?"

Martha heard the words, and starting up, shook off her mother's grasp, and stood aloof from her.

"What!" she exclaimed, "what do you

say? Had you anything to do with this, mother—any hand in my young mistress's trouble? God forgive you, if you have! Tell me!" she added energetically—"tell me the truth! I will have it?"

"It wasn't me exactly," whined her mother—"indeed it wasn't, Martha; but Mrs. Norreys has been here in my absence, and found out everything for herself, I expect, and therefore I need not keep it a secret from you, since you wish to serve her. It is my mistress, Mrs. Arundel, as has had a spite against her for a long time past."

"Had a spite against her!" ejaculated Martha. "Why, I thought they were such friends?"

"Yes, till a man came between them," said her mother. "You'll generally find a man a powerful enough reason to put the nearest friends asunder, Martha; and then Mrs. Arundel turned against her, and many's the time she's talked about having her revenge on her to me, and some weeks ago she made me give up a few things I had of Mrs. Norreys' in my possession, and put them to her own use."

And here Mrs. Wilson went into a lengthy description of Mrs. Norreys' flirtations with Major Craven at Gibraltar, and the scandal appertaining thereto, and how the proofs of such intimacy, having been preserved by her maid, were delivered over to her false friend, and by her forwarded with an anonymous letter to her husband. "And I suppose that's what has made a quarrel between her and Mr. Norreys," she wound up with, "because I had orders to post the letters (there were two others for the Countess of Riversdale and Mrs. Craven) in London yesterday, and as I did not do so till very late, Mr. Norreys would have reached the Abbey Lodge this afternoon. But it wasn't all my fault, Martha, indeed."

"Wasn't all your fault!" repeated Martha, contemptuously. "Mother, I'm disgusted with you. Wasn't your fault! when you gave up all the proofs that were to destroy the happiness of these people. What did you keep them for?" she added, turning fiercely round upon her. "Suppose she did flirt—woman like—I'd lay ten to one

there was nothing wrong about it, and I'm sure no lady in the land loves her husband more than she does now. I've seen her watch for his return for hours, and when his step was heard, such a beautiful smile would come over her face. *She* love another man, or go wrong with another man! I don't believe it, mother. That's left for women like you and me."

It was a bitter thrust, and Caroline Wilson felt it to be so; but she had no appeal to make in her own defence, and was compelled to remain silent and conscience-stricken before her indignant child. When the silence was again broken, it was still Martha's voice that spoke.

"What did my mistress fetch from here?"

"A blotting-case, with the papers in it, on which Mrs. Arundel tried her hand before she wrote the anonymous letters. There are copies of them all in it. They will tell Mrs. Norreys from whom the letters came."

"I'm glad of it—I'm very glad of it," exclaimed Martha. "Now the task will be

easy. Mother, you must go with me to-morrow morning to Brighton."

"Martha, why? What do you mean? I cannot leave the cottage in Mrs. Arundel's absence."

"You must go with me to-morrow morning to Brighton," repeated her daughter, decisively, "in the same train with Mrs. Raymond if we can—in the next one if we cannot: and if Weybridge wasn't such a distance from here, and the night so dark, I wouldn't rest till I had walked in there again, and told her so, and begged her pardon for the shameful part that you've taken in this business. But you shall beg it of her yourself to-morrow, mother?"

At this pleasant prospect, Mrs. Wilson, having reseated herself at the supper-table, attempted another protest, to the effect that she couldn't leave Weybridge, and she couldn't meet Mrs. Norreys, &c., &c., but without gaining her point.

"Then I'll leave this house to-night," exclaimed Martha, rising as she spoke, "and you shall never see me more, mother. If you don't do as I say to-morrow, you

must make up your mind to lose me again, for I swear to keep to my word. Now is it to be so or not ?"

Then Mrs. Wilson, in her dread of losing her daughter again, and her certainty of losing her situation, promised that she would do as Martha desired, and accompany or follow Mrs. Norreys to Brighton, there to beg her pardon, confess the share she had taken in the transaction, and bear witness against Mrs. Arundel for the same.

"That's right," exclaimed Martha. "You said you'd cut off your right hand for her, you know, and I don't ask quite so much as that. But this is only justice, and so much at least she deserves from you, She's given you back your daughter, mother, and you must give her back her husband, and the world's good opinion, and rid her of as false a friend as ever woman was cursed with. And perhaps when it's over you'll find that you've got the best of the bargain after all, for it's the only thing that could make me love you, and I believe my love's about the only thing you care to have."

And as Caroline Wilson saw the buxom

form again dispose itself domestically beside her chair, she felt that the game before her was, for once in this world, worth the candle.

But October mornings are dark and cold, and by the time that Mrs. Wilson and her daughter had made the old woman understand that she was to be regnant at the cottage until their return, swallowed their breakfast, and walked into Weybridge, the seven o'clock train for Bishopstoke, into which poor sleepless Rachel, after hurriedly drinking a cup of coffee, had leapt, was already far on its way to that station, and all they had to do was to wait patiently for the next, which did not start till nine. And so Mrs. Raymond Norreys had been in Brighton for a couple of hours, before their train rushed, panting, into the terminus, and disgorged them, to find their way as best they could to the house on the Marine Parade, where unsuspecting Mrs. Craven and her amiable and harmless friend had taken up their temporary quarters.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

The Marine Parade, at Brighton, is not the most pleasant residence in England, for those who like retirement and shade, and few make up their minds to suffer it for a continuance. For it is composed of one long unbroken row of slices, calling themselves houses; dreadful, uncomfortable-looking slices, which are all packed close together, and lean against each other, as if without that mutual support they must totter and fall. White and staring houses, moreover, whose windows blink and wink at the sun-lighted sea, as if they were weak eyes, and required a green shade put over them. Which some of their owners, in pity

for themselves, most certainly contrive to do. But the glare, and the innumerable stairs, and the sensation when you reach the top of one of those houses, and view the breeze sporting with the flapping window-blinds, and feel the shaking of the floor beneath you, that you are on board ship, or in a bathing-machine, or any other miserable predicament, is not the worst part of the Marine Parade at Brighton. For it is a thoroughfare abounding with unholy sights and sounds; with brass-bands and Ethiopian serenaders; with virtuous ballad-singing one-legged, one-armed, or one-eyed men, and women, followed by the proofs of their virtue (or vice) in the shape of endless trains of cleansed children; with performing ponies, and Punch and Judies, mixed up with a continuous and never-failing panorama of knitted dolls, fresh fish, fluffy mats, fruit, organ-men and monkeys—until, to attempt to meditate or read is to become, in thought, a suicide, and to approach one of the weak-eyed windows is to be seized with a violent and irresistible wish to do a damage to yourself or somebody else.

It is not much better when you stroll down to the shingly beach, for there you encounter bathing-women, shell-cats, and baskets of shrimps; nor, when the lamps are lighted, and you sit down to dinner, for then the music is mixed up with sounds of drunkenness and vice, and it becomes discordant. No! Brighton is not bearable, unless viewed from the luxurious seats of a well-hung carriage, with horses that carry you swiftly through everything that is unpleasant or inconvenient; but can never carry you away (run as they will) from the health-inspiring breeze, and the pure, fresh smell, which everywhere pervades that cleanest, most unpicturesque, and yet most fashionable of watering-places. And of all months in the year, October is the most pleasant month for Brighton. When other sea-side places are beginning to look dreary, and feel cold, the favourite resort of George, of unhallowed memory, begins to bloom as it has never bloomed since the January before. Not with vegetable beauty, although even that acknowledges the power of its mild autumn breezes, and lingers long

about it; but with human blossoms, who throng there to revive their drooping charms, and parade the town, esplanade, and pier, with their half-soiled dresses of the past London season, trailing behind them, as they go.

They look a little too self-conscious, those ruralising London belles, to be always pleasing; a little too contemptuously upon the dresses of the residents (who have, for the most part, been living next door to them during that wondrous season, if they had but known it); a little too much, perhaps, as if they thought their ways, their fashion, and their beauty were articles too good for Brighton, and only exhibited there because "everybody," is out of town. But still it is good to see them, if only for the pleasure of watching their fantastic airs and graces, as they cluster along the cliffs, their cavaliers in close attendance, and make a goodly show of English beauty. And if the Marine Parade is ever bearable, it is in the month alluded to, the very season, although now verging on November, that Mrs. Craven had chosen to desert her home

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and take a lodging there. She had usually sought the place before that time; but her visitors this year, and other reasons, had deterred her, and when the strain, both mental and bodily, of entertaining them was lifted off, she had felt the immediate need of change. Her son had not intended to join her at the sea-side. He disliked Brighton, in the first place, and none of his particular friends were there, in the second. But, when his mother wrote, urging him to visit her for a day, and to bring her some things that she needed from the Court, he did not like to refuse, particularly as the widow and her daughter were her guests. He was no less surprised than disgusted, when he heard that such was the fact, and that Mrs. Arundel had so little delicacy as to thrust herself in the way of meeting him again; but as it was the case, he did not care to put his mother, or himself, to inconvenience on her account. Besides, he was not averse to the idea of having an opportunity to treat her with the cool neglect that she deserved. And therefore he had presented himself at the Marine Parade, on

the morning that the housekeeper had surmised he had gone there, and been persuaded by Mrs. Craven to pass the night in Brighton also.

But he had found the day drag wearily, and intended leaving for Aldershot on the following morning. But on that morning, when his mother, after waiting breakfast for him until nearly ten o'clock, and receiving the maid's assurance that she had "knocked repeated" at his door, went up herself to learn the cause of his extreme drowsiness, she found his room vacated, and no traces of him left; and all the light that the servant had to throw upon the matter was, that there "came a note for the gentleman, a goodish bit past nine," and she took it up with his shaving-water, and put it inside the door; but she hadn't heard him go out since—nor even come downstairs, nor yet, nobody—and would Mrs. Craven please to have up the coffee and buttered toast, at once.

Mrs. Craven wondered where on earth he could have gone to, and the widow simpered "that it was exceedingly strange;" but they

waited for ten minutes more, and then decided upon having their breakfast without him; and it was well they did so, for the coffee, and the toast, and the other et ceteras of the well-furnished table, would have been truly uneatable and undrinkable, had they waited until Major Craven's return. For he was sitting the while, in the room of a quiet hotel a little way out of the town, clasping the hand of Rachel Norreys, and listening to the long and passionate story which fell from her excited lips.

"How glad I am that I stayed the night here! How very fortunate it is. I should never have forgiven myself otherwise," were the self-congratulatory phrases which kept ringing the changes upon one another, as Cecil heard what she had to tell him. And Rachel herself shuddered to think what she would have had to go through without his presence and protection, had she arrived, only to find him gone.

She had asked some of the railway officials to direct her in the choice of some hotel, as soon as she had left the train; and thence she had written the brief note, which

had brought Cecil, fresh from his bed, to her side. His astonishment at seeing her alone was only equalled by what he felt, when he heard the reason she had to give him for her presence there. Rachel did not spare herself or him, one iota of the whole narration. She repeated the words that had taken place between her husband and herself (all except that wild appeal of hers, which had been so roughly rejected by him), detailed the circumstances of her flight, and her subsequent discoveries at Laburnum Cottage.

"Look, here they are, Cecil," she said, producing the blotting-case and its contents for his inspection. "I have carried them in my hands the whole way. This is a copy of the letter that she sent to Raymond, these of those for Lady Riversdale and Mrs. Craven, I suppose. They are slightly different from his. I wonder your mother has not received hers, this morning."

"It has gone to the Court, no doubt," he replied; "the widow is too cunning to have had it addressed here."

"And I imagined it was Caroline Wil-

son all the time. I never could have suspected Elise of such a base and cowardly trick. Oh, Cecil! what motive can she have possibly had?"

"I will tell you her motive, my dear," he responded. "I will blazon it out to all the world, since she will have it so." And then he told Rachel the story of his quondam love-making to the widow, when he was but a boy, and her subsequent designs upon him.

"I was very young, Rachel, at the time," he concluded, "and all boys have their absurd fancies at that age; though Heaven knows, my youthful vision must have been unusually distorted. However, it was so, and it is the fact of my engagement to Frances, that has put this Jezebel up to her revenge. But I will be revenged on her in return. So help me Heaven!"

"Cecil! what are we to do?" asked Rachel, hurriedly.

"Do!" he rejoined shortly. "Why, I'll take you on my arm, Rachel, and march you up to the Marine Parade; and if, with our united evidence, and this bundle of

papers, we cannot utterly confound Mrs. Arundel, and give her, her orders to march, it will be a pity; for I'll be d——d, if ever she darkens my mother's doors again."

"But, Cecil, dear Cecil!" said Rachel, in reply, "that will not mend matters, so far as you and I are concerned."

He was not so quick as she was, and had not viewed the matter in all its various lights. He had thought that the treachery of the widow once fully exposed, and herself turned out of the house, the difficulty before them would be grappled with, and settled. But her imagination went beyond his.

"Why not?" he asked.

"It will prove Eliza to have been a false friend and as false a woman, Cecil; but though she has been both to us, the facts related in these letters remain *facts*, and cannot be disputed. You never made love to me, nor I to you, but how are we to satisfy my husband, or your *fiancée*, of the truth of our assertion, whilst we are unable to tell them why such familiarities passed between us, and yet we still were blameless. That

oath, Cecil—that promise to my dying father—it will be the ruin of us both."

"Good God!" was all he answered, as the truth of her assertion dawned upon his mind.

"We little thought, so careful as we were, that there was a spy upon our actions, Cecil, and an enemy within the camp; did we? We were simple enough to forget, knowing our perfect innocence, that appearances were so much against us, and that many a conviction takes place upon circumstantial evidence alone. But we have been foolish and imprudent, and the time has come when we must pay for our folly. But oh, Cecil!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "I am so sorry to think that I (to whom you have been so generous and so kind) should be the one to bring this blight upon your prospects; for I suppose it will prove the rupture of your engagement also."

"So be it," he replied. "If Frances cannot take me upon trust, she may go elsewhere for a husband. But it is I who should ask your pardon, dear, for soiling

thus your pure, unblemished fame through my thoughtless imprudence and self-indulgence; and I so many years the oldest. Good heavens! I have much to answer for."

"You cannot be more to blame than I am," replied Rachel. "On knowing that our interests were mutual, we were both alike in the desire to show affection to each other; but, Cecil, there is *one* who could clear up all this cruel doubt by a single word, and make us happy again. Could we not ask it of her? Surely we have a claim, at least, to make such a request."

"Ask her, and what?" said Cecil, in a low voice; "to tell *what?* Rachel, you forget. I, for my part, would rather never own another friend—would rather die—than have it published to the world. And you?——"

"I would rather die also!" exclaimed Rachel, in a burst of grief. "Oh, how I wish to God that I had never been born!"

"We will be all the world to one another henceforth," said Cecil, raising her gently in his arms. "Rachel, I told you once that

if ever you wanted a home, you would find it with me. Let me redeem my promise now. Come and live with me, and let us try to make up to one another for this rupture in our lives, by the exercise of the affection which occasioned it."

"But what would people say?" whispered Rachel.

"Hang people!" was the emphatic, if ill-judged response.

"Ah! no," she said, shuddering to imagine herself sunk still lower than she was, in the estimation of the man she loved—"ah! no, dear Cecil, though thank you all the same for your generous offer; but it cannot, and it must not be. There is but one path open to you and to myself—to live and pray that Heaven may send the means by which so foul a stigma may be lifted off our heads; and, if it never comes, to die without having encountered further reproach, however unmerited. It will all be made right then. Cecil, when this life is over Raymond will know my innocence, Lady Frances will acknowledge yours, and there will be no more disunion or misunderstanding between

us, and until that happens, we can only pray and hope——"

"Against hope," he replied, fiercely, "for the remedy is worse than the disease. No, Rachel; there is one thing more to be done besides praying and hoping, and that is, to kick the widow Arundel out of my mother's house—more practical and to the purpose certainly," he added, laughing, with a violent attempt to be merry, and disguise his feelings, "and very much to my taste. So, with your leave, I'll call a fly and take you to the Marine Parade. Whatever difficulties are in store for us in the future, this part of our duty has to do with the present, and is plain enough to my mind. Will you come at once, Rachel?"

Yes. She had dried her tears and was ready to follow him; and, by the time the fly was at the door, her simple dress was re-arranged, and she stepped into it without hesitation, the blotting-case still fast held in her hands.

"You are not nervous, are you?" inquired Cecil, as they stopped at the number of the Marine Parade at which Mrs. Craven lodged.

"Not in the least," she said. "I am too angry and too indignant to be nervous. When I think of Eliza Arundel, and of finding myself in her presence, I feel like a warhorse scenting the battle."

And, as she stepped from the carriage and up the tedious flight of stairs, she carried herself with a proud bearing, conscious of right and impatient of wrong, that well suited the character of the comparison she had instituted for herself.

As the drawing-room door was flung open, discovering the two ladies still sitting over the uncleared breakfast-table, and Rachel entered, accompanied by Cecil Craven, his mother sprang to meet them with an exclamation of unbounded welcome and surprise; but Mrs. Arundel turned ashy-white, although she attempted an echo of her hostess' sentiments.

"My dear Rachel," said Mrs. Craven, "what an unexpected pleasure to see you here! Are your mother and sister-in-law in Brighton, or have you only come down with your husband?"

"I am perfectly alone, Mrs. Craven,"

said Rachel, firmly, "and am come upon very unpleasant business, I regret to say."

And then, as Mrs. Arundel approached her, with a Judas-like kiss, although the lips that she proffered for her acceptance were livid with a newly-awakened fear, she put her away with quiet decision.

"No, thank you, Eliza; not yet; not till you have heard the errand that brings me here this morning."

There was no appearance of a girl about her then. Her manners were so stately and ladylike—her words so cold and composed—that she might have been practising how to convict her friends of unexpected treachery, without compromising her own dignity, all the days of her life.

"Rachel!—Cecil!—what is all this about?" exclaimed Mrs. Craven. "My dear children, what is the matter?"

"Matter enough," said Cecil, "and disgrace enough, as you will acknowledge presently, mother; but Rachel has come all this distance for the pleasure of telling her own story, and so I will not disappoint her."

The pleasantry of Major Craven could not divert, for one moment, the look of intense surprise which had crept over the face of Mrs. Craven—any more than the horror and amazement which were gradually becoming depicted in that of Mrs. Arundel—or the cool pride with which Rachel conducted herself throughout the whole proceeding.

"If Cecil wishes me to speak, I will," she said, "although he knows quite as much about it as I do. I need not ask you if you know these papers, Eliza," she continued, turning to that lady (for she could not at once divest herself of the habit of calling her by that familiar name).

Mrs. Arundel knew them well enough, as her agitated face denoted, but she gave a kind of sickly smile as she answered :

"What papers, dear? This is my old blotting-book, I see, that I gave some time ago to Caroline Wilson; but I really don't know anything about what papers may happen to be in it."

"Perhaps you don't know this one," replied Rachel, selecting and holding forth

the sheet on which the signature of Eliza Arundel had been so often scribbled.

The widow turned very white as she recognised it, but attempted no further to pander with excuses in her own defence; and indeed her lips were trembling too much to allow her to speak. She saw her fate was marching down upon her, though she had yet to learn by what unhappy chance it had so come.

"I will take a chair if you will allow me, Mrs. Craven," said Rachel next, "for my story is a long one, and I am tired."

And then they all sat down. As Rachel proceeded with her recital, Mrs. Craven's eyes were fixed upon her face, whilst horror and shame, and a look very like despair, passed over her own features. Cecil, a little apart from the others, kept his eyes sternly fixed upon the changing countenance of Mrs. Arundel; whilst she, convicted more forcibly by every word that issued from the mouth of her injured friend, kept quickly varying her impatient action from her foot to her head, from her head to her foot, whilst she

vainly attempted to sit still, and appear at her ease.

Rachel spared herself no trouble in the telling. In just as much detail as Caroline Wilson had related it to Martha the night before, did she now tell the story of her friendship at Gibraltar with Major Craven and Mrs. Arundel; and only when she mentioned the first did she venture to send an appealing glance to the eyes fixed upon her own, as though she would say, "For *this*, is it possible that *you* can blame me?" And before her glance, whatever its intimation, Mrs. Craven's own eyes drooped, and her face flushed with the pain of listening.

"I have told you everything, Mrs. Craven," said Rachel, in conclusion, "as I am bound to do, considering that a letter similar to this will be forwarded to you to-morrow morning. I have no defence to make relative to my behaviour with Major Craven. In my own heart I know no defence is needed, for we were dear friends, and nothing more; but I came here to-day to convict that woman of her deceit and

treachery towards myself and Cecil, and to ask you, after hearing this, if you will make more of a friend of her than I shall."

"Mrs. Arundel, is what you have heard true?" demanded Mrs. Craven, rising from her chair, and slowly addressing the widow.

"I suppose it would be no earthly use my saying it is *not* true," nervously giggled that lady, "when two people whom you think so much of as Mrs. Norreys and Major Craven, are resolved to have it otherwise, else I might have asked them for their proofs that these papers were written by my hand?"

"The proof of your own signature," shouted Cecil. "What better one is needed?"

"May not some one have been sufficiently interested in this affair to forge my signature," she asked, "and practise forging it? What motive should I have in making so much mischief?"

But before the words were well out of her mouth, Mrs. Arundel was conscious that in them she had made a great mistake, and bit her lips to know it.

"What motive, Mrs. Arundel?" demanded Cecil, striding up to her, and looking her well in the face. "Do you wish me to tell my part of this story? It is not a pleasant episode in one's life to have to relate before one's mother; but, if necessary, I will not shrink even from that."

But *she* shrank from it visibly, and the first consciousness of shame which seemed to have assailed her, mounted to her forehead.

"I see it will *not* be necessary," he continued. "You will own these papers as your writing, without forcing us both to go through such an ordeal?"

But Mrs. Arundel had no time to answer this appeal before the door was again thrown open, and the maid announced "two *ladies*" for Mrs. Craven, and Martha and her mother stood before them.

Caroline Wilson looked almost as confounded as Mrs. Arundel, but Martha bore more the appearance of a young lion than anything else as she pushed her way into the centre of the group.

"Martha, *you* here!" exclaimed Rachel in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes, please, ma'am," replied Martha in a violent hurry, and without any stops. "I followed you to Weybridge last night, and I arrived at the Cottage just when you had left it, and heard all about the blotting-book, and the shameful tricks that have been played you from my mother here; and if you please, ma'am, I have brought her down to Brighton to-day as a witness against them as did it, and to humbly beg your pardon, ma'am, for her share in the business. And now, mother," she added, giving her maternal ancestor a good shove, "the sooner you get it over the easier you'll feel in your mind, and that I can tell you."

But Caroline Wilson was not nearly so energetic as her daughter would have had her be.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," she said in a cringing, sneaking kind of tone as she was forced to confront Rachel, "for the turn things have taken, and I beg your pardon, I'm sure. I wish I had never given Mrs.

Arundel up the stud, nor the notes, nor anything, but she did so coax and persuade, and threaten and abuse me, that sometimes I didn't know if I was standing on my head or my heels, and put out, as I was, too, about my Martha here."

"What, woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, coming forward, "do you mean to lay all the blame of your own malicious revenge upon me, when you know you have had a spite against Mrs. Norreys for months past?"

Caroline Wilson did not mind being told she was malicious and revengeful half so much as being called a "woman," which is gall and wormwood to the lower classes, and especially to such as have least claim to the title.

"*Woman*, indeed!" she exclaimed, that famous "rough side" to her tongue turning uppermost. "Woman yourself, Mrs. Arundel, if you please. Do you mean to deny that you wrote all those three letters, and left them with me to post in London during your absence, and that you gave me a five-pound note before you could coax me to

give up that stud of Major Craven's, and the bits of paper? Woman, indeed! You're a nice person to call me a woman, when the whole regiment knows as well as can be that you were sweet upon Major Craven long before your own husband died, more shame for you! and 'twas in revenge for him taking no notice of you lately, that you went and wrote these letters. *Woman*, indeed! I should like to know who's a woman if you're not a woman!"

"Go on, mother; give her more," whispered Martha, delighted at Mrs. Wilson's eloquence.

But here Cecil interposed. With all his utter contempt for the widow's conduct, he could not hear a lady insulted in his hearing, and remain silent.

"Mrs. Wilson, you will oblige me by holding your tongue," he said, authoritatively. "What we want is, not your abuse, but your evidence. You are ready to affirm that Mrs. Arundel wrote the letters that you posted?"

"Ready to swear it, sir, and the reason why she wrote them also."

"That is nothing to the purpose," he replied. "Mrs. Arundel, do you deny it any longer, in the face of this witness?"

"I shall leave the house," said Mrs. Arundel, with an air of offended displeasure. "I thought I was amongst gentle people; but it seems I was mistaken. I shall not stay here to answer any more questions, put with the sole intent of directly insulting me." And she tried to gain the door as she spoke.

"Not so fast, Mrs. Arundel, if you please," now interposed Mrs. Craven. "I shall make no objection to your passing that door, never to recross threshold of mine, when you have first satisfied me upon one or two points. Of the personal share you have taken in this matter, and your reasons for so acting, I disclaim to question you. I am already sufficiently convinced of the amount, and evidence of both, but I cannot let you go from here, free to circulate your own version of this unhappy matter amongst your friends and mine, or leaving behind you no proof that what I am convinced of is the truth. Others,

besides Rachel Norreys and my son, will be sufferers through your malice. I must have a statement in your own handwriting to show to Lady Riversdale, and any others whom it may concern, that when we say you were the author of these cruel slanders, we speak no falsehood."

Mrs. Arundel now attempted to put on a show of great bravado.

"Oh! I can have no objection in the world," she said, "to confess that I wrote the letters. That is very easily done; and, after all, I only wrote what I know to have been the case. *Your* task will be a more difficult one, to prove them to be slanders."

But Mrs. Craven would parley no more than was necessary with her. With her usual quickness she wrote out a brief but complete confession of the authorship of the three anonymous letters, and handed it for signature to the widow; and Eliza Arundel wrote her name beneath it with as great an affectation of not caring about the matter, as if she had been affixing it to a marriage

settlement or a deed of gift. And then she raised her eyes, and said, addressing Caroline Wilson:

"Do you return to my service?"

"No, ma'am, never," was the answer, firmly given.

"Well, you won't get any wages, then," the widow briefly and almost lightly answered, and making a sweeping curtsy, which included the whole room, she added:

"A very good-morning to every one present, and you have my sincere wishes, Mrs. Craven, that this very unpleasant business may be as speedily cleared up as is consistent with possibility."

And then she sailed up the stairs, still trembling, still livid, but resolved to maintain an air of defiance to the last, and they saw no more of her until her box was heard being carried down to the hall-door, and Cecil, looking from the window, announced that the widow and her belongings were actually in a fly, and about to take their departure.

"And now we are rid of her altogether, thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Rachel,

we should bless the anonymous letters for that, if nothing else."

But the mournful look in Rachel's eyes recalled him to himself, and stayed his jocularity. The Wilsons had been dismissed before this to make their own arrangements, Martha having expressed her determination to stay with her mistress, and Caroline to return to her husband at Aldershot Barracks, and the three friends were alone.

"I can never bless them," Rachel said, sadly.

"My dearest child, you will surely return to your husband?" said Mrs. Craven, anxiously.

"To Raymond? How *can* I?" replied Rachel. "He believes me guilty; and how can I clear myself?"

Mrs. Craven looked nervously from Cecil to Rachel, and from Rachel to Cecil, and then she ejaculated faintly:

"Children, what bred this fatal intimacy between you?"

They glanced at one another, and were silent, she still gazing at them as if she

would wrest the truth from their very eyes.

"Mother," said Cecil, suddenly, and turning towards her, "it is impossible for us to tell you *why;* but perhaps you may guess we had a good reason for being thus familiar with each other. Would to Heaven that we never had been, that we had remained as strangers to this moment! But, mother," he continued, kneeling beside her chair, "if there is any knowledge in your heart this day why it was and why it should be so, and if you value my happiness and the happiness of the daughter of your old friend more than that knowledge, for God's sake speak, and clear our names—your name, mother, and mine—if not before the world, at least to those whom it immediately concerns, to know us innocent. If there are motherly feelings springing in your bosom at this moment as you see our distress, and something whispers in your soul that you could heal our trouble if you chose, listen to that prompting, even though it lead to the humbling of a pride more powerful than itself. We are all weak at

times, all foolish, and all faulty, but never so weak, so foolish, or so wrong, as when we suffer others to take the consequence of our evil-doing on their guiltless heads, and bear the blow, if not the blame. Mother, I could not bear to know you thus. I would rather see you dead. I would rather die myself, than not believe you to be all that is most generous, and motherly, and noble. Surely a public acknowledgment——"

"Hush! hush, Cecil! you mistake; you quite mistake," interrupted his mother, nervously. "Give me a little time first. At present let us speak of other things. Rachel, your husband must be written to."

"To what purpose?" she asked, wearily.

"To let him know where you are, and how far for truth these letters are to be depended on. Stay; it will be a painful task for you, my dear. *I* will write to him myself, and tell him that for the present, knowing you to be as innocent in the matter as himself, I shall retain you as my guest. And now, dear child, let me show

you to a room, and call your faithful Martha to help you to undress, for you must be in sore need of rest and sleep." And then when she had done as she had proposed, and was about to leave Rachel to herself, she bent and kissed her, saying, "Don't think more hardly, dear child, of — of any one than you can help. In God's good time all this misery may come right again." And Rachel had drawn her face down to her own, and whispered to her that whatever happened, she would have her blessing, if no other's, till she died.

"Cecil," said Mrs. Craven, re-entering the drawing-room, the tears still lingering in her eyes which Rachel's words had called there—"Cecil, I have suspected it before, and now I feel convinced, that you and Rachel know what I thought was a secret locked up in my own breast. Don't speak, my dear, to-day, or acknowledge it, because I feel I cannot enter into details; only tell me, why have neither of you ever mentioned what you knew?"

"Because we were bound by an oath

never to moot the subject to a living creature."

"And by——"

"Dr. Browne; he babbled it in his delirium."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed his mother, sitting down and burying her face in her hands, "how Thy judgments pursue Thy guilty creatures!"

"Dearest mother," said Cecil, softly drawing near to her, "you will not let her suffer for it, will you? You will not make us all miserable? You can see now what a fearful predicament we are placed in. Without you we can have no means of escape. I loved her; I tried to be kind to her, and this is the end of it—the destruction of all our happiness."

"No, no, Cecil! that shall never be!" replied his mother; "but give me time; only give me time; I cannot act alone in such a dilemma. I must have advice. Cousin Gus will be here in a few days, and then I will tell you further; but not now—not now."

"Cousin Gus!" ejaculated Cecil; "what on earth has he to do with it?"

But all her cry was:

"Only wait a little while, until I have again seen Cousin Gus; only wait, Cecil, until Cousin Gus arrives."

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF IT AT ABBEY LODGE.

Christine Norreys, returning with her mother from her afternoon drive, on that particular evening which had seen Rachel fly from the shelter of the Abbey Lodge, as if she was a guilty creature, was more than usually impatient to rejoin her sister-in-law. For there had been a talk of Raymond taking both of them to some entertainment at no distant date, and the (to women) all-important subjects of dresses and bonnets, and trimmings, had been brought under consideration in consequence, and Christine, being more interested in the matter than Rachel, had been trusted to

make the needful selections, and was anxious to know if they would entirely meet with the sanction of her sister-in-law. And so, having passed that hurrying, trembling figure in the fog, without further recognition of its individuality, and reached the Abbey Lodge, Christine sprung up the hall steps and the bed-room staircase almost in a breath, calling upon Rachel as she went. She burst without ceremony into the room which the latter occupied, and vexed at not finding her there, down she darted again into the hall, which Mrs. Norreys had, by that time, slowly gained.

"Where is Rachel, mamma?"

"My dear Christine," replied her mother, in her matter-of-fact voice, "how very much more reasonable it would be, if you would first think of removing those heavy wrappings before you heat yourself by running up and down stairs. How often I have warned you, that that is the very means by which you so frequently take cold. Not even your furs off—how very, *very* thoughtless of you, my dear."

"But I want to speak to Rachel, mamma,

and show her this ribbon. I shall have to write to Madame Elise this evening, you know."

"Your sister-in-law is doubtless in the drawing-room or the dining-room, my dear, since she is not up-stairs."

But impetuous Christine by this time had thrown both doors open, and discovered both rooms empty.

"No, she is not, mamma," she said, advancing to the hall-door again, and peering into the darkness of the covered pathway. "Where is that stupid old Benson? Of course, standing chattering with the coachman. Benson!"

The old servant heard the fresh ringing voice of his young mistress, and closing the iron gate, hastened to receive her commands.

"Benson! where is Mrs. Raymond?" exclaimed Christine, as soon as the man was within reasonable hearing.

"Mrs. Raymond, miss? I don't know, I'm sure, miss. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Norreys were both in the dining-room about an hour or so ago, but I have not seen them

since. I thought they were up-stairs, miss."

"Where *can* she be, mamma?" inquired Christine of her mother, almost fretfully.

"Are you sure you have thoroughly searched the up-stairs rooms, my dear?" was the placid rejoinder.

"Quite sure, but I'll look again;" and she bounded to the upper floor for the second time, followed by Mrs. Norreys. There they found their dressing-room fires lighted, and their lady's-maid in waiting, but no Raymond—no Rachel—not even any news of them.

"I'm sure for my part I haven't as much as set eyes on Mr. Norreys, nor yet on Mrs. Norreys, for the whole day," was the reply of their Abigail to the eager questioning put to her, "and can't say whether they went out or not."

"Ring for Martha," suggested Christine.

"Mrs. Raymond's maid is *out*, miss," was the prim reply, made with very compressed lips and the general air of proceeding from an injured individual.

"They must have gone out themselves,

mamma," at last concluded Christine, "and we shall not see them before dinner; and it must be nearly time for that now, so I will go and dress."

"A very strange proceeding, or so it appears to me," remarked her mother, "that Raymond should take Rachel out at this hour, and when she had already refused to accompany us for our drive—very strange and very unprecedented! but I suppose your brother knows what he is about; but a drive in a hackney cab, full of draughts (for he never *could* have been so mad as to take her out walking), is what I call anything but prudent at this time of the year, and for a delicate creature like Rachel."

"Oh! she will not come to any harm, mamma, depend upon it. I only hope she may be here before the post goes out, or I shall have to decide about those trimmings all by myself;" and Christine, more vexed than alarmed, vanished into her own room.

But the second dinner-bell rang, and the solemn Benson had announced that meal to be on table, and still the missing husband and wife had not returned.

"Shall we wait for them?" was the question that both mother and daughter simultaneously put to one another, but were each unable to decide.

But a stricter catechism having been instituted, through Benson, of all the servants, and resulted in nothing more than had been before elucidated, namely, that no one knew anything about the movements of either Mr. or Mrs. Norreys, the ladies resolved to sit down to their dinner without them. But it was a dull meal, rendered still duller by their uncertainty.

"Depend upon it," said Christine, determined to make light of the matter, "that Raymond came home unexpectedly with tickets for the play, or something of that sort, and we were so late that they could not wait for us. He has often said lately that he would take us both there; but I shall give them a good scolding when they return for daring to go without me."

"But in that case, my dear, surely your brother or sister would have left a note to inform us of the fact," suggested Mrs. Norreys.

"Too much hurried, perhaps," said Christine, shrugging her shoulders—"and after all it is very tiresome to be for ever obliged to account for one's actions in this world."

"Not when you are staying in another person's house, Christine," returned Mrs. Norreys with one of her most proper expressions. "A lady can never show too much deference to the established rules of the house she is residing in, nor to the wishes of its mistress. Politeness and punctuality cost little, and are the mainsprings by which the quiet and peace of a well-ordered household are maintained." Which speech only confirmed Christine in the opinion she had held from childhood, that her mother ranked the sins of being late for breakfast or dinner, alongside with the breakage of the ten commandments, and was not quite certain yet, even in her own mind, for which transgressions the wicked would be most likely to risk their salvation.

In the course of time, ten o'clock and prayers arrived on the same stroke together, and then as the line of domestics filed into the dining-room to listen to the long dis-

course which Mrs. Norreys read to them every evening, their mistress perceived that Martha Green (as she was there known) was not amongst them.

"Where is Mrs. Raymond's maid?" she inquired, before she commenced reading.

"Not *hin* yet, ma'am," was the ready answer, triumphantly but acidly delivered by the lady's-maid who *was* "*hin*."

Mrs. Norreys slowly shook her head as she adjusted her spectacles and gave vent to that unmistakeable sound which is caused by a boxing-match between the tongue and the teeth, and is expressive of impatience when uttered fast, and of a righteous but mild dissatisfaction when uttered slow.

But Martha's place was empty, and no "clucking" could fill it, and therefore the prayers proceeded without her, and were concluded.

"Benson, turn off the gas," were Mrs. Norreys' words—delivered, according to her usual custom, as soon as the servants had left the room again.

"Oh, mamma! do wait till they come in," pleaded Christine; "it is half-past ten

now, and none of the theatres are open after eleven. They will want some supper, too, on their return."

"My dear Christine," replied her mother, "your brother and sister know the regulations of the Lodge as well as I do. If they choose to transgress them, they must suffer the penalty. The supper-tray was on the table for half an hour, and the time that it is served, as well as the hours for prayers and bed, are familiar both to Raymond and Rachel, therefore there can be no necessity for delay on their account. Turn off the gas, Benson." And consequently the gas was turned off, and the servants retired to their beds, wondering if anything was the matter, and what could have become of the young master and his wife.

Mrs. Norreys immediately betook herself to her own room, and assuming a formidable-looking night-cap and dressing-gown, settled herself in the arm-chair before the fire, with her Bible in her hand, as calmly and sedately as if everyone belonging to the house was as comfortably disposed of as she was.

She was an excellent woman and mother, but the rules of her establishment had been infringed without notice given, and the offence, in her eyes, was not a light one; so often, too, as she had made her mind known upon the subject.

Christine, on the contrary, with no desire or notion of retiring to rest, remained in her room fully robed, but without occupation, as she listened anxiously for the stoppage at their gate of some one of the numerous cabs which unceasingly rattled along the road; or walked out on the dark landing and leant over the head of the staircase, as she waited for her brother and sister's return.

It came at last. When she had been thus kept expectant for about an hour, she heard the magic latch-key's welcome sound, crying "open sesame," first to the garden-gate, and then to the hall-door; and as the latter obeyed its command, she sprang, candle in hand, down the staircase, the better to welcome her sister into the inhospitable-looking and darkened hall. But when she reached it, she only saw Raymond; his

latch-key had in some manner caught in the lock, and as he was attempting to extricate it by violence, he did not appear to be in the best of humours.

"D——n this key," he exclaimed, "it's always playing me this trick now; why on earth can't those servants oil the lock?"

"Raymond!" said Christine, alarmed at not seeing her sister-in-law, "where is Rachel?"

"How should I know?" he answered roughly; "in her room, I suppose. I have not seen her since this afternoon." And as he extricated the offending key by a tremendous wrench, he hurt his wrist and swore another oath, although beneath his breath.

"She is not, then," replied Christine quickly, and now thoroughly frightened to find her brother was no wiser than themselves upon the subject. "Rachel was not at home when we returned at six o'clock, Raymond; and she has never been home since, no more has Martha: we thought, of course, she had gone out with you. Where can she be?"

Her brother had turned his face towards her as she spoke, and Christine now saw that it was very pale, and that his eyes were bloodshot. And when he answered her, his voice was harsh and rough, and quite unlike his usual gentle tones.

"What do you say?" he exclaimed, grasping her arm in his surprise—"Rachel not in the house—not been home to-night! What does it mean, Christine? where has she gone to?"

"That is the question I asked you," returned his sister: "how can we tell? but come up-stairs to mamma, Raymond, and do not look so wild, because you frighten me." And the hand which grasped her arm, was trembling almost as much as her own, as he mechanically obeyed her request and followed her to their mother's room. When he reached it, he flung himself into a chair, but did not speak.

"Mamma," said Christine, whose face was white as ashes, but whose heart was stronger at that moment than her brother's, "mamma, don't be alarmed, but there is some mistake here, we have both been mis-

taken; Raymond—that is, Rachel—has not been with Raymond, and he has not seen her since this afternoon; but it will all come right, mamma, it is sure to come right—pray don't look so terrified; there is Raymond to be comforted,—think of that."

Ay! think of that, noble women, in your first distress and horror,—think that there is a *man* requiring help and comfort, and put aside your own fears, your foolish fancies and nervousness, and rise up strong to succour in the time of need.

The face of old Mrs. Norreys grew calm again at her daughter's appeal; her trembling limbs steadied themselves, and she rose from her chair, and approached that whereon her son had thrown himself, burying his face in the arms which he had laid across its back.

"Raymond, my dearest boy," she said, trying in vain to hide the quivering in her voice, "you mustn't give way like this; it is very unaccountable and alarming, but only because we are kept in ignorance of its cause. It may be attributable to a mistake, or an accident, or thoughtlessness,

that dear Rachel has been forced to pass a night away from her home; but depend upon it, we shall see or hear of her with to-morrow's sun, and she will be very careful, I am sure, in future, not to give us such a fright again. There can be nothing wrong, my dear: take comfort—it is too soon to fret about it—we shall hear everything to-morrow."

And then Christine's sweet coaxing voice was heard.

"Raymond, dear, what is it after all—only a matter of a few hours since she was down here, well and happy. Nothing very bad can have occurred in so short a time. She may have gone out, intending to return to dinner or soon after, and forgot the time, or missed her opportunity, or—oh! a thousand chances might turn up to detain her that we have no imagination of, nor shall have, till she tells us of them herself. But, in the meanwhile, she has Martha with her, and therefore she is not alone, which is one great comfort."

"Is Martha missing also?" inquired Raymond, still in the same harsh voice, lifting

his head for a moment from the shelter of his arms.

"Yes, and has been for as long a time as Rachel; and therefore I think they must have gone, and will certainly return, together. Don't be frightened about her, dear Raymond; it will all be right to-morrow."

"It will *not*," he answered, rising from his seat, and almost pushing away the gentle arms, which love had laid about him. "You neither of you know as much as I do about the matter, or you would not talk such folly."

"Raymond, what do you know?" exclaimed Mrs. Norreys, with inconceivable terror in her voice.

"Mother," he said, turning towards her, "you should never have heard it from my lips as long as concealment was possible; but I see now, by her flight, that Rachel intends it to be known. She is under a terrible suspicion, mother, and her present conduct makes it look very like a certainty."

And then he related (what is unnecessary to be repeated here) how he had received

the anonymous letters that afternoon, and the particulars of his subsequent interviews with Rachel. He did not make any comment upon his story; he brought forward no opinions of his own, and deduced no inferences for their enlightenment: he simply told the facts, and nothing more; but throughout his narrative he never used the term "my wife," or spoke once as if he thought Rachel's fair fame would ever be re-established in his eyes. Christine listened, with the pitying tears standing in her own; but his mother's face grew sterner with every word he uttered. This was a disgrace she had never dreamt of, as liable to spring from the hasty and ill-judged marriage of her son. This was a blot that had never been known before, to rest upon the wife of a Norreys; and with her starched ideas and unspotted name, the mother of Raymond was the very last woman in the world, on any pretence, to pity or excuse it.

As he finished his narrative, and glanced towards her face, now stony and unsympathetic, he saw there that she had completely locked up her heart, and steeled it against

any soft or generous doubts which might arise about the truth of the case (however much appearances were against Rachel); and he resolved that, having told so much—discharged a stern but necessary duty—he would trouble her with no surmises of his own; no possible excuses for the absent; no appeals to her woman's heart to pity so much youth and tenderness and beauty, laid low and dishonoured, in the view of a harsh, ill-judging world. No! he had told his tale of misery—his mother might think Rachel what she would, but, hardly as he thought of her himself, he could not stay to hear reproaches heaped upon her now; and so, with the conclusion of his narrative, he left the room.

"That is all I know," he said, as he did so. "I received the letters, and she could not deny them, and I do not expect now ever to know much more. She intended, probably, by her subsequent disappearance, to tell me what she had not the courage to confess. But deeply as I feel all this, I am too great a coward, mother, to hear your comments on her history, or commiserations

for my loss; and the greatest kindness you can show me from this hour, is to forbear from all allusion to my misery, or myself."

And then the door slammed upon him, and before another word had passed between them, he was gone.

Mrs. Norreys gazed at Christine in rigid silence as Raymond left them, and Christine gazed upon her mother, but neither spoke. At last the older lady said, in tones of mixed solemnity and grief—

"This is, indeed, a heavy judgment on us. We have often been unfortunate before, in the world's opinion, but never guilty—never guilty."

"Mamma," said Christine indignantly, "you do not mean to say that you believe my sister to be really culpable in this business?"

"Do not call her *your* sister, Christine, I implore you," returned her mother; "she is no sister of yours, thank God! Guilty! Why what does her own husband think about her?"

"He loves her, and is blinded by his

love and by his fears," replied Christine; "besides he is a man, and cannot understand a woman as a woman can. I know there are plenty of guilty wives, mamma, walking this world and undiscovered; but they do not go about like Rachel—not with the same honest, unflinching eyes; the same straightforward, outspoken tongues—not with such courageous hearts, mamma, fearless of detection and unconscious even of being suspected. No! I never will believe it! Until she tells me so with her own lips, I never will believe that she is less innocent than I am, of this offence or any other."

"My dear Christine," replied her mother, "your championship does credit to your own warm heart, but you are prejudiced, my love, in this unhappy girl's favour, and cannot be considered an impartial judge. You heard what your brother said. Her own silence at once condemned her; it did not require her subsequent flight to convince poor Raymond of the fatal truth. It is an awful blow—I scarcely know yet what to think or do. I feel as if

it was too fearful a thing even to command belief."

"I don't *feel*—I *know*," rejoined Christine stoutly. "Mamma, if Rachel is what you think her, never have faith in your own sex again."

And then Mrs. Norreys tried to set the fallacy of such an argument before her daughter's eyes; to direct her attention to the object such anonymous letters could have in view, excepting that of doing a prudent, if not a kind action; but with all her sophistries, Christine's cry continued to be the same.

"What you say may be true in other cases, but in this I don't believe it, and I *won't* believe it. Rachel is as pure as I am;" and in the same belief she left her to retire to her own room.

But not just yet—not till she had crept on tiptoe to her brother's dressing-room; and, having ascertained that he was still up, had softly opened the door, and as softly entered. Not until she had seen Raymond leaning in a dejected attitude against the table, his head upon his hands, his gaze

directed into vacancy, and having seen him thus, had closed the door behind her, and going up to him, taken that weary head between her kindly hands, laid it on her warm young bosom, and when there pressed on it a shower of soft womanly caresses, that told him more than words could have the power to do.

"Dearest Raymond," she whispered; "my own dear brother, I do not believe it. I could stake my life to-night upon her innocence—my earthly happiness upon her love for you. For I have seen further, being a woman, than you perhaps have ever done; and I feel to Rachel as I should have felt towards a sister of my very own. I don't believe a word of it, dear Raymond; upon my honour I do not."

In her firm trust in the goodness of her brother's wife, and in her own youthful ignorance of the darker shades of guilt, Christine had no idea but that Raymond believed as she did, and sorrowed most because others would not credit Rachel with the virtue that he did himself. He had passed no comments on his tale whilst

telling it; he had only related facts. It never struck his sister that he could really think the woman whom he loved so much had been so cruelly false to him, and so crafty in the concealment of her guilt. But although Raymond, with a man's lesser powers of credulity, where his jealousy has been so roughly roused, and his honour is at stake, could not respond to his sister's appeal, or say he also relied on Rachel's innocence, he yet could hear the sweet soft womanly accents, pleading so unconsciously (because it was evidently imagined that no plea was needed) for his absent wife —for the woman he so passionately loved, and who he had often wished that day he had seen lie dead at his feet, before he had lived to know her false to him. As the endearing accents of Christine reached his ears, and through them, the inmost recesses of his heart, the barriers of his pride, and attempted hardness, broke down before them, and Raymond Norreys sobbed upon her bosom like a little child—as he had never sobbed since the days when corrections or disappointments had the power to bring the

tears into his eyes—as men never sob, except the iron from a woman's hand has entered in their souls—as but *one* woman in the world has power to thrust it, in the soul of any one man.

"Oh! Christine," cried Raymond Norreys, clinging to his sister as if he were the weaker vessel, and her tender womanhood the rock to which he looked for safety, "I have loved her from such a very child; I have thought upon and remembered her through so many weary years of expectation; I have tried to be so forbearing and so tender with her, since we met—and has it been for this? Have I loved her for this only? to break my heart at last. God knows how faithful I have been to her! I never saw the woman except Rachel, who cost me a thought, and now the thought of her will blast her memory to my dying day. Oh, sister! I wish that I had died before I knew it; I wish I could have seen her dead, and remembered and mourned her, only for her perished youth and loveliness; before I had lived to think upon what she has been—upon what she might

have been (had I never crossed her path and put a check upon her inclinations), and then waked up, only to remember what my darling has become—to what her fatal vow to me has led her." And far into the silence of that night, nothing else was heard except the convulsive sobs which broke unrestrainedly from Raymond's breast, and the laboured painful beating of the faithful heart he leant on.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST OF TOM WHITE.

But the next morning all seemed changed. The day broke sadly enough for the whole Norreys family, for none of them had had any rest, and they met at the breakfast-table with a half-guilty consciousness that each one was responsible for the restraint which sat upon the whole party; and that it behoved somebody to take the initiative, and broach the painful subject which occupied their hearts. And yet neither had the courage to do so. The servants appeared at prayers, with an evident understanding between them that something had gone wrong respecting Mrs. Raymond Norreys, and cast many furtive and curious glances,

in consequence, at the ladies of the family (Raymond not having put in an appearance) during the reading of the morning lecture, as if they would satisfy themselves with regard to what they wanted to know, from the sit of Mrs. Norreys' cap, or the colour of Miss Norreys' neck-ribbon. And though they left the room no wiser than they had entered it, the universal scrutiny had not passed unobserved by the mother and daughter.

"My dear, this will never do," was Mrs. Norreys' remark to Christine, as soon as they were alone again; "the servants must have *some* reason given them for Mrs. Raymond's absence, or they will put the very worst construction on this unfortunate affair."

"Very true, mamma," replied Christine; "perhaps you had better consult Raymond about it, when he comes down."

But this consulting of Raymond was by no means an easy matter, for when he appeared, haggard and dissipated-looking, from the sleepless night he had passed, he seemed scrupulously to avoid the subject of

Rachel, do what they would to lead the conversation in that direction. There were no traces left of that softened mood in him, to which Christine had been witness the night before—although it was evident that he had not forgotten it, from the trouble he took to elude meeting the glances of sympathy which she directed towards him. His sister fancied that he felt ashamed of having given way to tears before her: she had already determined that no one but herself should ever know of it, and she now resolved that, if possible, she would lead Raymond to believe that even she had forgotten the circumstance. But all her gentle endeavours failed to put him at his ease; for he was restless, and unmistakeably anxious to avoid notice, and when his mother casually addressed him, his answers were given in the same rough, harsh voice, that had characterized his speech of the night before. But still it was impossible that utter silence could be maintained between them on the subject of his wife, and therefore, after breakfast, when his mother saw that he was making preparations to

leave the house, she drew him into the drawing-room, and closing the door, put the direct question to him:

"Raymond, you must tell me one thing before you go. What do you intend to do about your wife?"

"What *can* I do?" he rejoined, curtly; "she has left no traces of her destination."

"I was scarcely alluding to your following her," replied Mrs. Norreys, "because I think it very unlikely that we shall not receive any intimation of, or from her, to-day—but, with respect to my servants, it must seem very strange to them."

"Oh! d——n your servants!" exclaimed Raymond, seizing his hat and making a rush for the hall door. "What do *I* care, whether they think it strange or not strange. The strangest thing is your choosing me, to make the recipient of such a piece of folly." And more excited than she had ever seen him before, her son left the Abbey Lodge, slamming the old door after him as he went.

"I think your brother's grief must have driven him half wild," Mrs. Norreys said

afterwards, whimpering over Raymond's conduct to Christine; "he used the most ungentlemanly language with regard to the servants, and slammed the door right in my face."

"How you can worry the poor fellow about servants at such a time, I can't imagine," returned Christine; "it's enough to make him impatient, when he has such much more important things to think of. Tell me what you want, mamma, and I will settle it for you." And then the difficulty of satisfying the servants' curiosity with regard to her sister-in-law's movements, without too severely compromising the character of the latter, was confided by the mother to her clearer-headed daughter, and a remedy soon found by the latter.

"Why, mamma, it's the easiest thing in the world: we must pretend to have heard this morning—that is all. Leave it to me. I will make some casual remark to Elizabeth, and she will march down-stairs immediately, red-hot to repeat it to all the others." And consequently, a few minutes afterwards, the said Elizabeth, did enter the

servants' hall, looking extremely disappointed, and said, "Law! it was nothing after all, for Miss Norreys had just said to her, as she was arranging the bed-room: 'What do you think, Elizabeth? Mrs. Raymond has played us such a trick—she ran off all of a sudden yesterday afternoon, to spend a few days with a friend, and left us to guess what had become of her until this morning. Wasn't that a shame? And poor mamma and I were so frightened till Mr. Raymond came home last night.' So you see," added the Abigail, "that there can't be nothing wrong, because Mr. Norreys knew all about it; but I call it a stupid trick to play anyone, that I do, raising a body's curiosity all for nothing—don't you?"

And the general opinion in the servants' hall, was that it was not only "stupid," but unpardonable to the last degree, particularly as they were led to expect, from the appearance of the two ladies at prayers, that there was something to be told, worth hearing. And the only consolation they could extract, was from the old cook turning up her eyes

at the receipt of the lady's-maid's intelligence, and saying, "Well, she'd been in the family for thirty years, and *ought* to know her mistress's temper by this time, also ways; and all she could say was, that if these was the kind of tricks the young Missus was going to play upon her mother-in-law, there'd be a row worth listening to between them before long." But the knotty point of the servants' satisfaction having been attended to, no other difficulties presented themselves for immediate grappling with, and the day passed wearily away as the post was hourly, and eagerly watched for, in hopes that it might bring them news of the runaway. Christine and her mother enjoyed a very melancholy and almost silent drive together during the afternoon, for nothing short of death in the house would have induced Mrs. Norreys to lay aside that time-honoured custom; and even then she would have resumed it exactly at three o'clock, the day after the funeral. But their son and brother did not reappear to bear them company; and Christine's bright eyes filled with tears every time they en-

countered Rachel's guitar, or her feet passed Rachel's empty room, and her heart wondered how long it would be before the mystery was cleared up. Even when the next morning, bringing Mrs. Craven's letter for Raymond, set aside their worst fears, and they knew that Rachel was in safety with her friend, matters did not appear in the way for amendment. Christine, had, of course, all faith in the statement of Mrs. Craven; and, assured of her sister-in-law's well-doing, and the baseness of the writer of the anonymous letters, would have been ready to reassume her usual cheerfulness, if she had been encouraged to do so by her mother or her brother.

But neither Mrs. Norreys nor Raymond believed in Mrs. Craven's epistle: of course (so they argued), she would try to screen Rachel; it was her object to do so—were not her son, and her son's fiancée, both concerned in the removal of the imputation upon her fame; would they not both be heavy sufferers by the impracticability of such removal: of course Mrs. Craven was the very one who would defend and shelter

Rachel Norreys, whatever her own conviction on the subject. And the discovery, that Mrs. Arundel had been the writer of the anonymous letters, and the raker up of the scandal, was no proof that the scandal was such, since the very person whom it most concerned, had not a word to say in her own defence.

Raymond confessed that he had never quite liked, or trusted his wife's friend, from the beginning. He was glad that she had been shown up in her true colours; and since her motives in writing the letters about Rachel had most probably been simply spite that she had been turned out of the family by whom she had hitherto been made so welcome; but all this did not remove one stain from Rachel, one doubt respecting her from her husband's heart. She had admitted Cecil Craven to a culpable familiarity with herself, and God only knew the rest. For Raymond's part, he scarcely dared to think of it. He answered Mrs. Craven's letter very briefly—but with decision. He was obliged to her for receiving Mrs. Norreys into her house, but

he could not see in what measure the arguments she had favoured him with, removed the unpleasant impression under which he had laboured, since receiving the anonymous letters. When Mrs. Norreys could herself deny the statements made therein, he would be the first to disbelieve them.

He made no allusion to Rachel's returning to his protection, nor to his own distress at her absence; and Mrs. Craven, on receiving so cold and stern a reply, felt that her mission so far had failed, and that in order to restore these two people to mutual confidence but one thing remained to be done. But of that, more hereafter.

In the meanwhile, Raymond threw her letter in the fire, and wished that he could throw all remembrance from him in like manner. But the more he wished, the more impracticable the deed appeared to grow. The image of Rachel, as a child, as a woman, in her tears, her merriment, her silence, and her passion, hovered before him, sleeping or waking, and kept him perpetually upon the rack. And he had hoped so much lately from her altered conduct

to himself, and from the increasing love which she had manifested towards his mother and Christine. And now all his hopes were smashed — utterly and irrevocably ruined. He had sorely felt his sorry welcome home; he had fretted more than enough at times since then, but nothing that had ever grieved him yet could compare, in intensity, to the bitter disappointment, the baffled hopes, the tender feeling waiting upon outraged love, that Raymond Norreys experienced now.

And he was not good at bearing, without a murmur, an "undeserved lot." He was impatient under suffering,—fiercely so, at times, and ready to argue with his fate and curse it, when he could not prove his argument. And he tried to drown all this, as men (heedless of past failures) *will* try, in dissipation. He had never been a very careful liver (what sailors are?); and when Raymond Norreys said that he had dissipated, he meant it in the full meaning of the word; and in after days he was heard to confess, more than once, that

during the first week of Rachel's desertion, he certainly had "kept it up."

What would old Mrs. Norreys, with her puritanical ideas and stiff-starched notions of propriety, have thought, if, in fancy, she could have followed her only son, during that brief, mad season, in which he thought he had found the waters of Lethe, to his ultimate discomfiture! What would she have thought, who made it her boast, and believed what she affirmed, that he had never in his life taken a glass of wine too much for him, could she have watched him occasionally between the chiming of the small hours, as he sat in places, which he would have blushed the next day to have had to mention to her; perhaps, even to have had to recall to himself. Ah! those were sad hours for Raymond Norreys to look back upon, in after years—hours which were best unaccounted for, which he would have been happy to have been able to forget; but, during that evil time, chance (or so it seemed at first sight) threw in his way a motive for action, which, slight though it was, had the power to divert him

from much that was wrong, and led eventually to a great and wonderful change in his fortunes. He was strolling late one night, or rather early one morning, for lack of better employment, into a café near the Haymarket, where he had been in the habit, lately, of meeting several wild spirits of his acquaintance, when he saw, to his surprise, that the shutters were already up, and, on entering by a private door, found that the whole place was in a state of the greatest confusion and disorder—chairs, benches, and tables were upset—glass and china broken—liquor of various kinds spilled about the floor and wasted, whilst a crowd of gamesters, both male and female, were hiding away in some of the private rooms, and the proprietor of the café was in perfect despair at the wreck around him.

"Why, what's been the row?" exclaimed Raymond, as he sauntered into the dismantled bar, and spied the general *mêlée*.

"Oh, Mr. Norreys!" replied the man, who knew my hero by name, and finding himself alone with him, ventured to pro-

nounce it; "we've had the bluebottles in here, and my number's down for a fine, as sure as can be; all along of that bully, Lord—(you know his name, sir, without my speaking it); and see the scrape he's got me in. However, I managed to get most of the lot smuggled into the lower billiard-room, and there they are, all locked up together; and I'm blest if they'll come out under an hour, for I'm convinced those bobbies are watching the house still, and will do so until they're tired."

"How did it happen?" inquired Raymond.

"As usual, sir, a row between two of them, and sides taken up. And I haven't told you the worst of it yet, for one of the gentlemen is so badly hurt about the head that I had him taken up to my wife's room, and she sent word just now, that she thought we ought to send for a doctor; and I *shall* catch it hot, if that's necessary. By-the-by, sir," continued the proprietor, slapping his thigh, "you know the gent well enough by sight, and, now I come to think of it, he bears the same name as yourself; though," he added in a tone of confidence,

"that isn't known to everybody, and I should wish it to be between ourselves."

"The same name as mine?" returned Raymond; "not spelt the same though, I bet."

"Well, I don't know, sir, but if I'm not mistaken, I rather think it is—with a *y* and an *e*, sir; yes, I rather think so."

Raymond was just ruminating on the strangeness of the man's assertion, for he had believed their own family to be the only one spelling their name like himself, when a second messenger came from the upper regions to say "that the gentleman that was hurt was very bad indeed, and the mistress thought he was dying." Then the landlord's face grew pale at the idea of having a corpse in the house to account for, and a coroner's inquest sitting upon it; and he asked Raymond if he thought he ought to send for a doctor.

"Let us go and see him first," suggested Raymond, "the women may be mistaken;" and the landlord seized at the idea, and led the way up the dark staircase (for all the gas had been turned off at the approach of

the policemen) to the site of his private apartments.

There, laid in a comfortably-enough furnished bed-room, and watched by a silken-dressed and ringletted woman, Raymond encountered, to his surprise, the scarcely-breathing form of the man who, under the name of Tom White, had taken the trouble to go out of his way, in attempting the seduction of poor Martha Wilson. He had met him too often lately, and watched him too narrowly, to be mistaken in his identity, even though his face and head were smeared with blood, and a large bandage hid the greater portion of his features. He was laid upon the sofa, but he appeared perfectly nerveless, as he hung over the side of it, with eyes turned upwards and mouth partially opened. The sight of him sobered poor Raymond (who had not been *quite* sober before) completely.

"Good heavens!" he said, "he looks very bad; how long ago did it happen?"

"About two hours, sir," replied the woman, "and it's a dreadful cut — right across the back of his head—done with a

bronze lampstand, one of the girls told me; but the hair is quite driven into the wound, so that I can't tell whether it's very deep or not."

"Has he spoken at all?" inquired Raymond.

"Not a word, sir," she replied; "and I think he had a kind of fit just now, for he stretched himself out, and worked about a good deal, but he didn't make the least sound."

"I think you should send for a doctor at once," said Raymond to the landlord; "the man is seriously hurt, if not dying. If he dies in your house without assistance, you will suffer for it."

"I will send immediately," replied the proprietor, seriously alarmed at the appearance of his customer. "If you could stay here for a little, sir, you would greatly oblige me."

And Raymond, who felt a strange interest in the man, from the circumstance of his having been brought under his notice on the subject of Martha, readily promised compliance, and took his seat by the side of

the sofa. He had forgotten what the landlord had said, relative to his bearing the same name as himself. But when the doctor came, and, having examined the wound, pronounced it to be a very dangerous fracture of the skull, and the patient at that moment to be labouring under congestion of the brain in consequence, he turned to Raymond and asked if he had been in any way connected with the unfortunate affair.

"Not at all, I am happy to say," was his frank rejoinder. "I arrived long after it had happened, and am only here at the request of the landlord. Do you think he will recover?"

"Are you a relation of his?" was the return question.

"None, not even a friend. I have met the man occasionally before, but am ignorant of his very name."

"Then I may as well tell you—there is no chance for him. If his combatant could be traced, it would be a case of manslaughter. His friends should be communicated with."

"I don't know who they are," said Raymond.

"Have you searched his pockets?" demanded the medical man.

"Scarcely. It was no business of mine," he replied, shortly.

"Then I think, under the circumstances, I shall be justified in doing so, though I do not expect he will ever revive sufficiently to recognise any one again. We are about to look in this gentleman's pockets to see if we can discover who his friends are," he added to the landlord, who now re-entered.

"I can tell you his name, sir, and I'm sure I wish now I'd never heard it, for this is by no means the first scrape he's got me in, though I suppose it's likely to prove the last. He is a Mr. Norreys, same name as this gentleman here."

"It is not an uncommon name," said Raymond, still adhering to the notion that the stranger's patronymic must be spelt "Norris." But when the doctor had taken a whole packet of papers from the dying man's pockets, and was turn-

ing them over in his hands, he remarked casually—

"Spelt in this manner, it *is* an uncommon name, sir—Norreys. We don't often meet it so, nowadays."

"Will you allow me to look at that envelope for a minute?" said Raymond, interested in the discussion, and when the doctor, complying with his request, passed the paper over to him, and the following address met his astonished eyes, he could scarcely believe for the moment that he saw correctly: "Archibald Norreys, Esq., 14*a*, Albany, London." But before he had time to express his surprise, the doctor tossed him another.

"Very little doubt about this, sir," he remarked. "Here is an unposted letter, evidently intended for some relative of the patient's," and Raymond read: "To Sir Archibald Norreys, Bart., Woolcombe Rise, Berks." He remained so long gazing at the two envelopes, and lost in surprise at their superscription, that the doctor became impatient.

"Now, sir, there is no time for wool-

gathering—we must go to business. Perhaps you find you *do* know this gentleman's friends, as you appear so interested in the addresses of his letters?"

"I told you, Mr. Norreys, the name was spelt the same," whispered the landlord, at the same moment reading the papers over his shoulder.

"I believe I do," he said, answering the doctor's remark alone. "What should be done next?"

He did not think it worth while to tell them that it was his cousin that was lying in a state of stupor before them; and that until this moment he had been ignorant of his residence in town—almost ignorant of his existence.

"The next thing to be done is to communicate with his nearest relative, and since you seem to have some knowledge on the subject, I think you will be the best person to do so, if you will take the trouble."

"I do not mind the trouble," returned Raymond, "but I am not certain of this gentleman's identity. I suspect, however,

that he is the son of this Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise."

"Whew?" whistled the doctor; "Sir Archibald must look out for another heir then, I am afraid."

"If I undertake to telegraph to him," replied Raymond, quietly, "what shall I say?"

The doctor's remark had stirred up new and strange thoughts in his breast, but with a heavy trouble weighing him down, they did not excite him so much as they might otherwise have done, and he remained, to all outward appearance, as unconcerned as he had been before they had been suggested to his mind.

"Simply that Mr. Norreys has sustained a fracture of the skull, and that if he wishes to see him alive, he had better come to town at once. That is all that can be said, beside giving the address. It is no place for a gentleman to die in, and if he could be moved with any degree of safety I would have him taken to my own quarters, but his sole chance lies in perfect quiet. I shall stay with him myself, and if you will

kindly see to the telegram being sent to Woolcombe Rise as early as possible, you will be doing him the best service you can."

"I will drive direct from here to the station," observed Raymond, in reply, "and the message shall be sent the first moment practicable. I shall look round here in the course of the morning, Mr. Barnett," he added, having ascertained the name of the practitioner, "so, until then, good day to you."

And full of thought, still more sad than that with which he had entered it, Raymond Norreys left the café again.

CHAPTER VI.

A TURN IN THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

It was a comfort to poor Raymond (melancholy as the subject was) to have "something to say" to his mother and sister, when he met them at breakfast that morning, that did not in the least refer to, or had any connection with, the unfortunate topic of his wife. As they had never been made acquainted with the episode of Mr. Tom White, or been told anything more, with regard to Martha Wilson beyond the commonplace information that she had had "a young man," and, at the desire of her mistress, dismissed him, it was unnecessary to inform them further, than that Raymond had met with

a stranger, dangerously wounded in the manner described, and had accidently discovered him to be their cousin Archibald Norreys, and the heir of Woolcombe Rise. They had never associated in any way, nor even been recognised, by their Berkshire relations, as I mentioned in an early chapter of this story, and therefore the news had little effect upon Mrs. Norreys and Christine, beyond making them give vent to a great deal of surprise at the strangeness of the rencontre, and a good deal of pity for the dying young man, which they expressed by a string of ejaculatory phrases —such as, "How dreadful!" "How very shocking!" "Poor fellow!" "What a horrible idea!" "How distressing for his poor father," &c., &c. As to *where* Raymond had met his cousin and under what circumstances, my hero managed, by skilful fencing, perfectly to satisfy them without compromising his honour or himself; and the two women were innocent and pure, and unsuspecting of evil (as all innocent people are), and swallowed in perfect faith, anything he chose to tell them. They had

been all so very sad before, that the melancholy recital had no power to increase the lowness of their spirits; indeed, it tended to work good, especially with Raymond, to whom it gave fresh ideas, and something to distract his mind from dwelling too much upon his great grief.

"I wonder by what train Sir Archibald will arrive," he said, as he prepared to leave again. "I suppose the first intimation he ever received that there is a Raymond Norreys in the world, was, when he saw my name upon the telegram. It will be a sad meeting between the father and son. I dare say he will have no time even to notice me."

"I dare say not, my dear," replied his mother, "and it would be little use if he did. The families have always been so very much separated. Unless, indeed," she added, lowering her voice, "the worst happens with his son; and then you have not forgotten, Raymond, that——"

"Oh! hush, mother," he replied, as if he were pained at the allusion. "My cousin may not die after all. Doctors are

often mistaken; and if he does, Sir Archibald might marry again. Don't raise my hopes for nothing."

"Perhaps it is as well not to be premature," she rejoined. "But the baronet's marrying again is scarcely likely; he is an old man now. The poor young fellow who lies wounded must be older than yourself, Raymond."

"About the same age, I should think," he replied. "Had he any sisters?"

"No; the last Miss Norreys died two years ago. I should think this would be a great blow to poor Sir Archibald. Well! well! all our troubles seem coming together."

Raymond heaved a great sigh, and left her. As soon as he arrived at the Haymarket café, he was met by Mr. Barnett, the doctor, with two pieces of news.

"I regret to say, it is all over, Mr. Norreys; he died at seven o'clock this morning, and here is an answer to your telegram to Sir Archibald (or I conclude so); it arrived but this moment."

Raymond was quite unprepared for either

piece of intelligence, and he looked very grave as he opened the printed official envelope.

The words were few.

"From Sir A. Norreys, Bart., Berkshire, to R. Norreys, Esq., London.

"'Your message received. Shall be up by the noon train. Send some one to meet at Waterloo Station.'"

"By noon?" exclaimed Raymond, examining his watch. "Why it is nearly that now. Will you meet Sir Archibald, and break the news to him?"

"Well, I think, Mr. Norreys," replied the practitioner, who did not like the idea of the job any more than Raymond did, "I think that my place is by the side of the corpse, until Sir Archibald gives orders for its removal—if *you* would not object, sir."

"I ought not to do so," replied Raymond, "for to tell you the truth, this gentleman was my cousin, although we have been so much separated as to be unknown to one another. I confess I shrink from having

to carry such news to his father; but if you think it your duty to remain by the corpse——"

"Well, Mr. Norreys, it must be as you wish, of course," returned the doctor, whose opinion of Raymond had risen ten per cent. directly he heard that he was related to a baronet; "but I should think *you* were the fittest person to break the news to Sir Archibald."

"Well, well! I will do so," replied Raymond hastily, "and had better be off at once, as the time is going fast. You will allow no one into the room to inspect the remains, if you please, till we return."

"Certainly not, sir; it is locked up, and I have the key in my pocket."

And then Raymond jumped into a hansom, and went about his melancholy business. And in this place, perhaps (since her name may never again be mentioned in connection with his), it will be as well to say, that poor Martha Wilson was never informed of the real name of her lover, nor of the cruel circumstances under which her master met

him. Months afterwards, indeed, the news of his death was broken gently to her by Rachel; but of all other truths concerning him, she remained ignorant until her own.

Raymond Norreys did not reach the Waterloo Station till some minutes past twelve, and was afraid at first that he would miss the train: but when he got there, he found that it had not yet arrived, and the porters and guards were all on the platform in a state of expectancy. Another five minutes passed, and then Raymond stopped an official to ask him the reason of the delay.

"Can't say, sir," was the answer; "it often happens so with the country trains."

A jocose porter passed them at the moment, whistling.

"Well," he cried to the guard, "don't seem as though your pet Ascot was coming to time this morning? The 'Firefly's' bust—told you she would." And then the guard, who did not appear to relish a joke against his favourite engine, spoke to Raymond again, passing over the

vulgarity of the porter with silent contempt.

"She's been very likely detained, sir, by some of the cross trains. That line's a regular bit of network. She can't be long now though."

A quarter of an hour—twenty minutes—were gone; and still the Ascot train was due. A dozen trains had rushed panting into the terminus since Raymond had patrolled the platform, and yet the one he looked for came not.

"It was lucky," he thought at first, "as it gave him time to think over the approaching interview with the bereaved father; but as the minutes went on, other expectant friends became impatient, and he caught the infection. Two or three husbands who had come to meet their wives or families, an anxious mother who was expecting a little child from the country whom she had not seen for long, and others who were pressed for time, and annoyed at being obliged thus to waste it.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Raymond at last, "*is* the train coming this morning, or is she

not? People cannot be hanging about all day in this manner."

The face of the guard whom he addressed had grown graver since he last saw it.

"We are afraid there must have been a stoppage somewhere, sir," he replied; "she's not used to be but a few minutes behind her time, but we shall hear presently, no doubt."

"I hope there's nothing wrong," said Raymond, and he thought at the same time what an aggravation it would be to poor Sir Archibald's distress to be compelled to delay upon the road.

"Wrong! bless you, no, sir!" replied the guard, in a tone of the extremest cheerfulness. "How should there be? We shall see her directly."

"If she don't make haste," observed another guard, "she'll run into the down train."

"She's been delayed," said the first speaker, with an air of certainty, "and is waiting for the down train to pass—that's it, to my mind."

And the various watchers, male and

female, looked very much relieved by the tone of decision with which he pronounced these words.

Thirty minutes—forty minutes—past the hour of twelve. By this time there were more officials on the platform than those ordinarily seen there—men in plain clothes, and evidently of higher authority, kept passing on and off it, and communicating with the lower servants of the company. And at last a messenger came for the principal there, and he went into the telegraph office, and some body in theanxious crowd conjectured that news of the missing train had arrived. Raymond's curiosity and something more, had been raised by this time, and he appeared as eager as the rest for intelligence of some sort. They all pushed forward, pursuing the man to the door of the office, and he followed in their train—all, excepting, indeed, the mother who had come to meet the little child she had not seen for so long, and whose limbs, refusing to bear her up any further, only allowed her to sink down, white as death, and trembling like an aspen leaf, upon the

nearest bench. The little crowd would have pushed itself right into the telegraph office if the guards had not prevented it.

"There's a message come," one of them said, in order to restrain its eagerness, "and you'll hear all about it in a minute if you'll be quiet."

One moment of unspeakable anxiety, and then the man intrusted with the deliverance of the message reappeared. He was the same to whom Raymond had twice before spoken. He had by nature around and jovial face, but just now, as he stood before them with the written message in his hand, he seemed to have shrunk somehow, and grown suddenly pale. Yet still he attempted an air of great courage, if not cheerfulness.

"There's no denying there's been a slight accident," he said, "but we hope it won't prove of much consequence. The twelve o'clock train being after time, was run into by one of the down trains a little this side Ascot, and some damage done. A few parties have been hurt, and those parties are on their way here now by another

train, together with them who haven't been hurt at all. So we hope in a few minutes that all here will meet their friends again safe and sound."

"Any killed?" demanded a faint voice in the crowd—faint though belonging to a man, for he had come to meet his one-year wife returning from a visit to her mother in the country.

"Well, the stoker is gone, poor fellow, and the driver, and a better man never drove engine," was the reply, "and one or two more, perhaps; but we've had very few particulars, and no names, and must wait for the next message. But I feel confident there's none gone belonging to any here," continued the guard, with more benevolence than reason, perhaps, as he tried to smile away the ghastly fear he saw depicted in almost every face before him. The truth was that the telegram had merely said, in reference to the loss of life: Thirty killed and wounded—latter sent by a slow train; but, as the guard remarked to Raymond Norreys, when, having explained that he had no great personal interest in the

loss, he extracted the facts from him, "It's as well to make the best of it to them at first, sir—they'll know it soon enough, poor creatures."

There was a dead hush in the crowd after the delivery of the telegraphic message. The men turned away, sick at heart, and some of them showing it in their whitened features, but all silent except they had women with them to support and comfort; but the wives and mothers became clamorous in their demand for more particulars, in their desire to know the worst—the very worst at once. The woman who had sunk upon a bench and yet heard all, now dragged her trembling limbs up again, and staggered to the office door.

"Oh, sir!" she said, to the good-humoured guard, with dry white lips that could scarcely form the words—"about a child—a little child!"

He took her by the shoulders and gently forced her down again upon the seat.

"Now you just stay quiet there," he said, "until I fetch you a glass of water. The child's safe enough, depend upon it—

you'll have him in your arms in another minute."

But as he turned away to fetch her the refreshment that he promised, she sank quietly down upon her side, and fainted away.

One o'clock—twenty minutes past one—and still the eyes of the expectant crowd are turned eagerly in the direction by which the train with the survivors of the accident must arrive. There it is at last, slowly puffing its way towards the terminus, as though loath to be the carrier of such bad intelligence.

"Is it the very train?" "Are you sure?" "Might it not be from somewhere else?" "Is there another due?" were amongst the eager questions which burst from such lips as were not too excited to speak at all, or do anything but silently pray for strength, as the engine passed the platform, and dragged the line of carriages after it. It was not a long line; the passengers that could be moved had been sent on just as they were, without baggage or any other encumbrance, and the passengers that could be moved,

alas! were few. Medical men were on the spot, and had been for some time, and the first thought, and the first rush, were for the carriages in which the wounded had been conveyed.

"There ain't many of them, sir," was the remark of the guard in attendance upon it; "and there's a doctor from Ascot along with them as it is."

He was a young guard, and new to the service, and his face was very pale as he said the words, and remembered how few were able to be moved, and how many more would never move again. As the railway carriages were emptied of their contents, the scene upon the platform was one of harrowing interest; for those who waited there, and happened to receive their friends intact, were as much overcome as those whose keen eyes took in at a glance that *theirs* were left behind. Indeed, Raymond observed, that of the two the former were far the most demonstrative, and many kisses, tears, hysterics, and faintings took place liberally on both sides, between the restored friends and relatives, whilst those

whose hearts had sickened, as one stranger after another stepped out of the carriages, and were recognised, and still *theirs*, their own—perhaps their *one*—came not—either staggered off the platform, as though suddenly struck blind, or else sunk down, dumb and senseless, to be trampled on, as might be, beneath the feet of the embracing and embraced. But amongst the passengers who left the train by themselves, Raymond Norreys could see no one who answered to the description of the man he came to meet. He looked eagerly for a bent form and a grey head, but there seemed no old men amongst them. He had liberally tipped the officials on first hearing that there was likely to be a crush and a confusion, and they were all anxious to help him in the search.

"An old gentleman, sir—named Sir Archibald Norreys? Come this way, sir; perhaps some of the passengers may know him by sight."

But the passengers were all too much occupied with their own concerns to answer questions, and no Sir Archibald appeared.

"Afraid the old gentleman's not in the safety carriages, sir. This is the way to the wounded carriages;" and Raymond followed the friendly guard, with a shudder, to the fore part of the train.

But as he neared it, he was startled at hearing a familiar voice saying—

"By Jove, sir, I shouldn't know I was hurt, except you told me os, by Jove; I feel a little pain certainly when I am moved, but nothing to signify. I believe I could walk if I was to try—by Jove, I do."

"You must not attempt it, sir; indeed, you must not," said the doctor's voice, raised in expostulation; and then, as Raymond rushed forward to confront the first speaker, he added to his brother practitioner, "He's fainted again, Mr. Stevens; we had better move him now into the waiting-room;" and Raymond saw the senseless form of Mr. Northland borne past him as in a dream.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as he peeped forward to gain a better view—"Mr. Northland!"

"Is this passenger a friend of yours, sir?" demanded one of the doctors, who was

assisting to carry poor "cousin Gus" into the waiting-room.

"Yes, I know him; but he is not the friend I came to meet. By-the-by, are you from Ascot?" he continued, turning round to a face he had not seen upon the platform before.

"I am," was the reply.

"Can you tell me if an old gentleman, Sir Archibald Norreys, is amongst the wounded?"

"He is *killed*," was the sudden reply. "I know Sir Archibald well, I have attended the family. He was amongst the first who were extricated from the débris of the broken carriages. It has been a terrible smash, sir. I was very much shocked to see the poor old gentleman's body. I know it to be a fact, for I examined it myself." But here one of the other doctors touched the speaker on the arm and said—

"Be careful what you say; perhaps it's a relation."

And indeed, Raymond Norreys had turned so very pale, that no one could help seeing that the news had in some manner

powerfully affected him. He grasped at the door-lintel for support, as the Ascot doctor piled the assurances of the truth of his assertion one upon another, and appeared at first as if he had no words wherewith to answer him. The suddenness of the news; the extraordinary revolution which the confirmation of it would make in his fortunes, was too much for him. He had been shocked at the awful death of his cousin; he was still more shocked at the double tragedy of which he was now informed; but through, and above all feelings of the kind, he could not forget that the two accidents, dreadful as they were, must result in his becoming Sir Raymond Norreys—that he was (even whilst he grasped that door-lintel), in fact, a Baronet. It was not in mortal man to forget it, particularly as his affections were not interested on behalf of the deceased; however much his humanity might prompt him to feel for the untimely sacrifices which had made him so.

"I am a relation of Sir Archibald's," he said, as he recovered his tongue and his

self-command together, "and I am very much shocked to hear of his death, particularly as I had come to announce sad news to him. His son also died in London, this morning."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young Ascot doctor. "What, that scamp! I beg your pardon, though, I am forgetting myself; but you have really interested me very much. So young Norreys is dead, is he? Who's the next heir?"

They had by this time deposited the form of Mr. Northland upon the waiting-room table, and the Ascot doctor appeared very anxious to discuss all particulars of the Norreys' succession with Raymond; and the latter, although he had no intention of gratifying his curiosity with respect to himself, thought he might give him some useful information, and to that end drew him on one side.

"Sir Archibald Norreys was a cousin of mine," he said hurriedly, in explanation of his own want of advice; "and I came here this morning to break the news of the loss of his son to him. Mr. Norreys also came

to his death by an accident, and his body must await an inquest here. What ought I to do?"

"Your time is your own?" demanded the young surgeon.

"Entirely so," replied Raymond.

"Then I should first depute some one to stay with the remains of Mr. Norreys, and then cut down to Ascot, and make arrangements for Sir Archibald's body being moved to Woolcombe Rise, as soon as the inquest there is over. You can't do better than that. There is a butler in the house who has been there for years, and will arrange everything as well as you could do it yourself, and—hang it, what luck!—you'll find Sir Archibald's men of business there too; I know you will. Packer and Mitbury their names are; they have been there shooting for the last month. You should set them to work at once, to look up the heir. Who *is* the next heir? I believe *you* are," said the Ascot doctor, who was young and facetious, and not to be put down. "Then you must cut back here and superintend the

removal of the poor young fellow's body to Berkshire. By Jove! fancy both of them gone in one day. Sad thing, isn't it? But I'm wanted again, and I must be off." And the young doctor ran away as he spoke. Raymond felt he had given him good advice, but it was one of those moments in a man's life when he feels utterly confused and senseless, and hardly knows how to act for the best. So many events had crowded lately one upon another, and above them all was hovering the great and unexpected knowledge of the change in his prospects, that he felt quite giddy when he tried to think. However, the first thing was certainly to return to the Haymarket café, and have an interview with Mr. Barnett, and with that intention, and forgetting all else, Raymond was about to leave the station, when another of the doctors touched his shoulder in passing, and said—

"I expect your friend there is more hurt than he thinks for, sir."

"Who? what friend?" demanded Raymond, waking from a reverie.

"The gentleman we first carried into the waiting-room. But the injuries are internal, and it is difficult to say."

Then Raymond remembered poor Gus Northland, and asked if he was sensible.

"Yes, quite so, and very anxious to be moved from here."

"I will go to him," said Raymond hastily, and when he entered his presence, and was recognised, the pleasure of Cousin Gus was extreme.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I am so delighted to see you, by Jove! You'll have me moved from this abominable place, won't you? I want to get down to Brighton to join Mrs. Craven—Brighton always sets me up, it's the healthiest place in England, by Jove it is! and my own doctor is there into the bargain."

"But are you fit to be moved, sir?" asked Raymond.

"Fit to be moved—of course I am. I've hardly any pain—except when I'm shaken. I fell under one of the carriages—such a smash, by Jove! You should have been there, Norreys."

Raymond did not exactly coincide with this last opinion of Cousin Gus', but his friend the Ascot doctor now appearing in the room again, he asked him his opinion about Mr. Northland's case.

"Who is he?" first demanded that lively practitioner, and then added, "He's as obstinate as a mule anyway. No! of course, he oughtn't to be moved further than necessary, but he's just the kind of man who will suffer if thwarted. What's the matter with him? We can't tell yet; haven't had time to examine; but he was crushed under the carriage, and, I think, the numbness he boasts of, is incipient paralysis. However, I don't give it as a settled opinion, mind. Move him to the nearest hotel for the present, and when there, you must act, of course, under further advice. I can't wait a minute;" and the young doctor, who was a very clever fellow, and lived eventually to become a physician, all through his own energy and promptitude, disappeared in the crowd, to the aid of some other sufferer by the accident.

"What does he say?" demanded Gus Northland, who had guessed the import of Raymond's conference with the doctor.

"He says you must not be moved further than the nearest hotel, until we have more advice about you," replied Raymond.

"He's a fool," said Cousin Gus, unscrupulously; "why I'm scarcely hurt at all—bruised a bit, I dare say; and I shall feel it more to-morrow, and that's why I want to get on as soon as I can. Norreys, will you go down with me to Brighton?"

The proposition took Raymond very much by surprise; but high above the trouble and inconvenience of the arrangement (when he had so much business on his hands) rose the thought (and which would not be crushed even by the question of its use) that he should see Rachel again.

"Say you will," urged the wounded man; "it's only a couple of hours' journey."

"Let me get you safely to an hotel first," argued Raymond.

"Not till you've promised to do as I wish," rejoined Gus Northland; "'tisn't much, by Jove!"

It wasn't much, after all, and Raymond promised as the sick man required him.

"But you must give me a few hours' grace first," he pleaded, "for I have business to do which cannot be delayed."

And on these conditions, Mr. Northland consented to be removed to the nearest hotel; and a stretcher was procured in consequence. As he was being carried away on it, Raymond walking by his side, the latter saw the friendly guard advancing to him, with an air of mystery.

"It's true, sir, I'm sorry to say; some of the names have come on, and the old gentleman's is among them. This is he, isn't it, sir?" and he displayed the official communication in which the name of Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise, was plainly transcribed.

"He's well known about those parts, sir, so there ain't a shadow of doubt about the truth of it," was the man's final remark as he refolded the paper.

"Thank you," replied Raymond; "I shall run down there in a few hours myself,"

and then followed in the wake of Mr. Northland's stretcher.

Having seen him comfortably settled at the hotel, and sent for the best medical advice, Raymond left him to return to the Haymarket café. There he arranged with Mr. Barnett to have proper persons left in attendance upon his cousin's corpse, until such time as the coroner's inquest, having sat upon it, he should be at liberty to have it enclosed in a receptacle fitting the dust of the heir of Woolcombe Rise, the orders for the preparation of which, Mr. Barnett promised to see given and carried out at once.

And then Raymond Norreys returned to the Waterloo Station, and flew down to Ascot, to which there were many extra trains running that day, in consequence of the accident, to inform the servants at Woolcombe Rise that they had lost their young master, and the late baronet's solicitors, Messrs. Packer and Mitbury, that the rightful heir would never come home to claim his father's acres. He found the grand old place in great confusion, the

news of the baronet's sudden death having, of course, reached there; and the intelligence he brought himself was scarcely less unexpected, as Sir Archibald had left them in the morning with the simple knowledge that his son was ill, and his presence in town required.

The occasion of meeting, therefore, was a very awful one; and the two gentlemen of business had scarcely less inclination to offer congratulations to their new client (who they knew well enough to be such) than Raymond had to receive them, for he could not yet contemplate, without the greatest horror, the means by which he found himself a baronet, and the owner of the noble property he now looked upon. So conscious was he of this feeling, that he scarcely liked to look round the sumptuously-furnished rooms of Woolcombe Rise, or to admire the property itself, for fear lest the servants and friends of the deceased should imagine that he was already congratulating himself upon being the master of so fair a domain, and forgetting in its possession, the bloody means by which it had

become his. So his visit to Woolcombe Rise was very short and very subdued; and having ascertained that the lawyers, being on the spot, would see everything done that was necessary, he pleaded unavoidable business in London as a reason for his hasty departure.

"Of course, Sir Raymond, you will be down for the funerals," observed Mr. Packer, as he prepared to leave them.

Raymond started as his new honours were thus thrust upon him, but the gesture was not noticed by the solicitor.

"Of course," he answered: "in the meanwhile, Mr. Packer, you will oblige me by sending notices of these sad events to all whom it may concern to know them. I have been so much at sea, and our branch of the family has been so much separated from that of Sir Archibald, that I know none of his immediate friends, and the male relations of the name, I am aware, must be few and distant. But I should wish everything to be conducted on the most liberal scale, and in a style correspondent to the rank of the deceased."

"Certainly, Sir Raymond, certainly; your wishes shall in every respect be attended to. Good-morning, Sir Raymond, good-morning."

And "*Sir Raymond*," echoed from the lips of gentle and simple, were the last words that greeted our hero as he left Woolcombe Rise to return to the side of his poor, but troublesome friend Gus Northland.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. NORTHLAND IS OBSTINATE.

For when Raymond came to have another interview with him, he found that Mr. Northland promised to be very troublesome indeed. The physician who had been sent for, to see him during his absence, and who was a man of great repute in his profession, met Raymond as he entered the hotel and begged to speak with him in private. He said that Mr. Northland's was a very difficult case to decide upon at once; that he certainly thought himself that he had received some severe internal injuries, and he was surprised that he did not appear to suffer more pain. He should have advised the patient being kept in bed, and very

quiet for the next few days, until something further had been ascertained relative to his condition; but that he was so positive on the subject of being moved, and appeared so excited at the prospect of a refusal, that he feared lest crossing his inclinations might be productive of more harm than good, and bring on the very symptoms it was most desirous to avoid—namely, inflammatory ones. The physician understood that Mr. Norreys was an intimate friend of Mr. Northland's, and about to accompany him to Brighton; would he guarantee that he should be placed under able medical advice directly he arrived there?

To which Raymond replied, "You mistake in thinking that I am a very intimate friend of Mr. Northland's; I know him, certainly, and I promised if he was moved to Brighton, to go with him; but I can guarantee nothing beyond that. He has his own friends down there, so doubtless he will have the best of advice and nursing, but it would be far preferable they should be telegraphed for, to come to him."

"Infinitely preferable," interposed the

doctor; "in fact, I will not disguise from you, Mr. Norreys, that it may be the saving of his life; but Mr. Northland is so very self-willed and positive, that——"

But Raymond was beginning to see the risk which would attend his removal in a clearer light, and had little patience for what he considered a mere fancy.

"Oh, that is all nonsense," he said, decisively, "I will speak to him myself;" and strode upstairs with the genuine conviction that a few words from him would bring Cousin Gus to reason. For after all, this going down to Brighton at the present moment, when his head and hands were so full of business, was a very inconvenient affair. He had not been able yet, even to inform his mother and sister of the deaths of Sir Archibald Norreys and his son. And as to the hope which had sprung up in his heart on first entertaining the proposition—the hope of seeing Rachel again, and of listening to her voice—what mattered it after all, since no good could possibly accrue from it? She was virtually dead and lost to him. No seeing her again,

no hanging on the tones of her voice, could unmake her what she was, or render her capable of clearing herself again in his eyes. No! the inheritor of a title which had been claimed by a dozen generations, and the owner of Woolcombe Rise, must thenceforth live unmated, and die unblest; since no honours, or wealth, or wishes, could restore Rachel Norreys to the innocence he once believed that she possessed. And as the thought struck Raymond's heart, he felt how thankfully he could resign all and each, to be able to call one woman, for one day only, his faithful wife. But the alternative was not his to choose, and the knowledge did not make him more disposed to be lenient towards the apparently unreasonable desires of poor Gus Northland. It was all folly, it was nonsense; the proper thing to do was to telegraph for Mrs. Craven to come up to town; and the proper thing should be done. But when he entered the presence of his wounded friend, his thoughts took another turn. The soft brown eyes of poor Cousin Gus were looking so much more anxious than

obstinate, his manner was so excited, and his face so flushed, that Raymond felt that if mischief had not already commenced, a very little opposition would be the means of making it do so; and he scarcely liked the responsibility thus thrust upon his hands. Still he attempted to act up to the determination with which he had entered the room, as he drew a chair beside the invalid's couch, and said, "Well! how are you now, Mr. Northland? all the better for being quiet, I dare say."

"I'm keeping up pretty well," was the reply, "but deucedly anxious to start. What a time you've been, Norreys! Four hours, by Jove! When does the next train go to Brighton?"

"I couldn't have returned sooner, or I would have done so," replied Raymond. "But are you quite determined still to go on to Brighton? A man is generally a good deal shaken, you know, by an accident of this sort; and the doctor so strongly advises your being kept quiet—indeed, they said the same at the railway station. Suppose I telegraph for Mrs. Craven to come

up here and see you? That would amount to the same thing, wouldn't it?"

But the sick man's look of anxiety, lest the proposal should be carried into effect, increased to one of positive dread as Raymond rose from his seat, as if with the intention of executing his purpose.

"Stay, Norreys," he exclaimed, grasping his arm; "no, it wouldn't do at all, by Jove! You haven't done it already, have you?" and then, as Raymond did not immediately deny the charge, he added, "If you have, I'll send another to stop her, by Jove I will, if I go to the station myself to do it. I'll go down to Brighton alone; I don't want any one's aid. I'll——"

"Pray compose yourself," interrupted Raymond, surprised at this burst of excitement on the part of supine Cousin Gus; "I have done nothing of the kind, nor do I intend to do so without your knowledge. I only want to persuade you to be advised for the best; travelling so soon may make you worse."

"Pooh! pooh!" said Gus Northland in return, "it won't make me any worse; I

tell you I suffer scarcely any pain—I have said so all along, haven't I? and I *must* go to Brighton to-night."

"You may pooh-pooh the matter as much as you please," replied Raymond, irritated at the other's perversity, "but I have set the risk you will run before you, and if, after that, you suffer for your own obstinacy, do not blame me."

"I shall blame no one," said Mr. Northland, "but if you won't take me down, I must go alone. Why, my own doctor, Sherard, lives there. We always have him up to Craven Court when any one's ill—we do, Norreys, by Jove; and what folly it would be in me not to go to him when I have the opportunity. Besides, I don't want any doctor; it's a mere bruise I've received, that brown paper and vinegar will cure; and—you *will* take me there, Norreys, won't you? I *particularly* wish to go, by Jove I do!"

And his tone of authority sank into one of utter beseeching, as he put his feverish hand into Raymond's and made his last request. As he did so, the latter started to

find how hot and dry it was, and felt, with the physician, that further parley would perhaps only make the patient much worse; and so he soothed him with a promise, and left him to ascertain how soon the train could take them to Brighton.

"It's of no use," he said, as he thrust a double fee into the physician's hand; "he is bent upon going, and even persuasion seems to agitate him; besides, he continues to insist that he feels scarcely any pain."

The doctor shook his head.

"I cannot understand that," he said; "however, it is one of those cases, Mr. Norreys, where the mind is evidently strongly working upon the body, and the only thing to be done is to try and humour both. At the present time I can confidently say that emotion of any sort will do Mr. Northland more harm than even a shaking. Better take him on then, as he desires, and get him into a bed and under good care as soon as possible, and he may not suffer much in consequence."

"I have your sanction then for his travelling?" said Raymond.

"Only because the alternative would probably be more hurtful to him," was the dubious reply; "of two evils, choose the least."

And acting upon this advice, Raymond Norreys (having despatched a hasty telegram to tell his mother not to be alarmed at his absence) found himself an hour later journeying towards the sea, with Gus Northland stretched at full length on a mattress beside him. It was by this time seven or eight o'clock in the evening, and the only light in the railway carriage was that of the flickering oil-lamp, by which it was impossible to read. Raymond sat for some time after they had left London silent and absorbed. He did not feel inclined to talk or make himself agreeable; he was too much annoyed at the continued obstinacy and selfishness of Mr. Northland in persisting to make this journey against the advice of those who knew better than himself. It was of a piece, so Raymond thought, with the rest of his foolish life—so incapable of directing himself—so averse to being led by others; and the reflection

made him feel harsher, than he liked afterwards to remember, to the sufferer beside him. For as time went on, the oil-lamp—dim and uncertain as it was—yet showed the surrounding objects sufficiently clearly to enable him to note the changes which were passing over the face of Mr. Northland. When they first left the Waterloo Station, he had kept up the same appearance of unconcern and disregard to pain which had characterised him since his accident; but as the train rushed rapidly through the night air, leaving town after town behind it, it appeared as though he thought it no longer necessary to keep up the indifference which it was evident he did not feel; for by the undefined light of the oil-lamp, Raymond could see how much paler he was growing with every fresh mile they traversed, and how frequently his features twitched when the motion became rougher or more rapid; and once or twice during the long tunnels, which lie on the outskirts of Brighton, he fancied that he heard him groan.

"I am afraid, Northland, that you are

feeling this shaking more than you choose to confess," Raymond said, when, having passed through the last, he could once more depend upon making his voice heard; "but we are very near Brighton now, so I hope the worst of it is over."

The sick man unclosed his eyes, and smiled a ghastly smile at him.

"You're a good young fellow, Norreys, by Jove, you are," he said, faintly; "and I thought you were a clever one; but I've been sharper than you have to-day," and Cousin Gus tinkled a species of unmanly laugh, that was very unpleasant to listen to.

"How do you mean?" demanded Raymond, with curiosity.

"Why, with respect to myself," Mr. Northland replied. "I didn't think I was so good an actor. It's a pity I didn't take to the stage long ago, for I've been an idle fellow all my life. Why, my dear Norreys, I've cheated the doctors and all of you: for if I had only confessed one half of the pain I have suffered to-day, they would have strapped me to my bed before

they would have let me travel down here—that they would, by Jove!"

"You don't mean to tell me you are as bad as all that?" exclaimed Raymond, in alarm. "Good heavens! what may I not have to answer for?"

"Nothing! my dear Norreys; nothing! It isn't your fault. You're the best fellow I ever came across. I don't know what I should have done without you, by Jove! For I must have come down to Brighton to night anyway. You've been an immense comfort to me," and the sick man pressed his hand as he spoke.

"But what made you so positive about travelling, Northland, if you felt so ill?" persisted Raymond. "Mrs. Craven would have attended you in London, and the doctor, too, for that matter. It was very wrong, indeed, of you. You may have risked your life by the imprudence."

"No such great risk, if I have," replied the other, with the same sickly smile. "But I have urgent business here; and my great fear, from the moment I was hurt, was lest I should die before I settled

it. Very important business, Norreys; and that must not be delayed; and you are the very man I could have wished to accompany me; for from the first moment that the falling carriages struck me here" —he continued, laying his hand upon his chest—"I felt that I was badly hurt. I did, Norreys, by Jove. And I determined nothing should keep me from coming down here to-night. The doctors would have known it, too, if I had only told them the feelings I experienced, but I gave the lie to every question they put to me." And Cousin Gus feebly chuckled over the remembrance of his having outwitted the medical men. Utterly inactive and indifferent to passing events in his lifetime, he now appeared just as inert in the prospect of the death, which he knew he had reason to fear was marching down upon him.

But Raymond was horrorstruck at his last avowal, and the part he had taken in his removal.

"You did very wrong—very wrong, indeed," he exclaimed, in his excitement.

"I do not know what I shall say to Mrs. Craven about it. And when she would have attended you so readily, too."

"Ah! so she would, God bless her!" said Gus Northland. "She's been always only too good to me; and it is on her business and yours that I desired to travel. Don't think twice about it, Norreys. Whatever happens would have happened anyway; and to tell you the truth, I've never thought I should get over it, from the moment that it took place."

But the look of astonishment in Raymond Norreys' eyes, as Gus Northland alluded to the business which carried him to Brighton having some connection with himself, could not fail to attract the other's notice.

"You are incredulous, Norreys, as to the possibility of my affairs having any reference to yours; but you'll be wiser, by Jove! an hour hence. Oh! these trains! how deucedly slow they are; shall we never be there?"

But even as he spoke the carriages halted for the inspection of tickets, and in another

minute they had arrived at the station. Raymond lost no time in procuring as easy a conveyance as he could, and, at a foot's pace, proceeded with his charge to the Marine Parade. He was impatient to deliver him over to Mrs. Craven's keeping—impatient to learn what business on earth it could be, having any reference to himself that had made Mr. Northland persist in his determination to travel to Brighton—doubly impatient, though he would not acknowledge it even to his own heart, to find himself once more in the presence of the wife whom he distrusted. When the vehicle stopped at its destination, Raymond's heart appeared to stop with it, and suddenly become lead in his bosom.

"Stay!" he exclaimed eagerly, laying his hand upon Mr. Northland's arm. "Keep quiet for a minute. I must run up first and prepare them for your reception."

And having obtained the entrance (with a ring only) to Mrs. Craven's abode, he left his friend in the carriage, and walked upstairs to announce their unexpected arrival. Mrs. Craven, her son, and Rachel

Norreys, were sitting alone in the drawing-room; for Cecil had only returned to Aldershot for the purpose of obtaining leave to spend a longer time with them. They were all so unhappy; there was so miserable a restraint between his mother and her guest, and so great an anxiety on his own part to see the wretched mystery which had caused them all such pain cleared up, that he felt no relief except in being on the spot administering such comfort as he might to Rachel, in the prospect of everything coming right in the end, and urging Mrs. Craven, by every means, but undisguised solicitations, to make herself and them happy as she best knew how. But although he had mooted the painful subject more than once to his mother, her cry continued to be, "Wait till Cousin Gus returns. I have written to him, Cecil, and he will soon be here—pray wait patiently (ask Rachel to wait patiently) until your cousin returns."

And now Cousin Gus had returned, was even at the door, though as yet they knew it not. In reality it was only a week since Rachel had left the Abbey Lodge; but

counting by the length of the weary hours as they had dragged their slow course along for her, it might have been a month. She had hoped great things from Mrs. Craven's note to Raymond; surely, a third person telling him that she was convinced of her perfect innocence (the very mother of the man for whose sake her character had been aspersed) would weigh greatly with him in her favour, (and although Rachel was too proud to acknowledge it, she would have resigned everything she possessed to hear him ask her forgiveness for the cruel suspicion he had entertained of her); but when his curt, cool answer came, she had lost that hope, and with it the little humility that she retained. She had nothing further to say to him, or for herself. Truth was not the slightest avail, and she possessed no other weapon; and notwithstanding Cecil's constant assurances that all would be cleared up eventually, she imagined, from that moment, that for her, Life was over. And poor Major Craven's prospects were not of the brightest either. Lady Riversdale's letter, in which she

affirmed that, unless this scandal was fully explained and done away with, she could no longer hear of his engagement with Lady Frances Morgan, still lay unanswered in his desk; to say nothing of a tiny secret note, blistered with tears, from the young lady herself, in which she implored her dearest Cecil only to "*say* it was not true, because, notwithstanding what she had *heard* and *seen* whilst at the Court, she was ready to disbelieve it all, at one word from himself." But Major Craven as yet could not say that word, and, therefore, both ladies were kept in suspense because he was too proud to ask their sufferance of his inability to explain himself, and too honourable to satisfy their scruples at the cost of his given word. But if ever he cherished a feeling in his heart for Mrs. Craven that was not all that a son's should be, towards a mother, it was during that long week of suspense and anxiety which preceded the arrival of poor Cousin Gus. Raymond Norreys stepped lightly up the stairs, and, unannounced, entered the drawing-room, wishing to take the party by surprise; and

he certainly obtained his desire, for had a ghost stood amongst them suddenly, they could not have been more astonished. Cecil Craven, with a decanter of wine on the table before him, was carelessly turning over the papers of the day; his mother, employed in some fancy-work, was vainly attempting to divert her thoughts from the sad topic which engrossed them; whilst Rachel, sitting on a sofa by herself, away from the light and near the fire, was gazing into it—with clasped hands and knitted brow—as she tried to answer the question to herself, of why she had ever been born.

As the door suddenly opened, and her husband appeared in their midst, Mrs. Craven, thinking of nothing but immediate reconciliation between the two, sprung to her feet with an exclamation of blended surprise and pleasure; Cecil also, knowing that Raymond's suspicion of his wife, if not correct, was, under the circumstances, justifiable, was not unwilling to extend a welcome to him; Rachel alone, having uttered a faint cry as she recognised the figure which had now advanced into the

centre of the room, stood for a few moments motionless and irresolute, and then sunk down again upon the sofa, whence she had risen.

But Raymond Norreys appeared to take no notice of any one there but Mrs. Craven, and with her he very slightly shook hands: as to Cecil, our hero looked at him as if his dark eyes would cut him through; and to that part of the room where Rachel was (although the loud beating of his heart told him she was there) he never even turned his head: glancing at the mistress of the house alone—speaking to her alone—he said hurriedly—

"I have to apologise for intruding amongst you, Mrs. Craven, but my visit here to-night is not from choice, but necessity; I regret to say that—pray don't alarm yourself—Mr. Northland, whilst in the railway, met with a slight accident—or we trust it will prove so."

"Oh, good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, clasping her hands, "he is killed."

"No, indeed, he is not," quickly rejoined Raymond; "he is waiting below in the

carriage, but as I was fearful you would be frightened if you saw him carried up-stairs without any preparation, I ran up first to tell you of his accident."

"And you have brought him here, Mr. Norreys?" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, weeping. "Oh, how good of you—how can I ever thank you enough! Pray bring him up-stairs at once; my poor Gustavus! Cecil, go with Mr. Norreys."

"Thank you, I require no aid," replied Raymond haughtily, as he turned to descend the stairs again; "but you had better prepare the bed for his reception."

"Not a word to you, my love; not a look," exclaimed poor Mrs. Craven sympathetically, as she turned to where Rachel stood, and embraced her trembling form.

"Never mind me—pray don't think of me," was the quick reply; "I neither need any notice, nor wish it."

Oh, rebellious and sensitive heart! in reality aching for one glance to say it was forgiven and understood, how wonderfully it could disguise its deepest feelings at the call of its master passion—pride! But

Mrs. Craven had no leisure for further pity or remonstrance, and by the time that the united efforts of Raymond Norreys and the coachman had conveyed Gus Northland, white and faint, to the top stair of the landing, she was ready waiting to direct their steps into a bedroom on that floor, and not until they had deposited their burden there, did she venture to obtrude herself upon the notice of the invalid.

"Oh, my dearest Gustavus!" she then said, sinking by the side of the bed, and giving way to a flood of tears as she noted the extreme pallor of his face, and the drawn expression of his features, which was very visible, now that he was brought into the bright candlelight. "How did this happen? are you much hurt? shall I send for Dr. Sherard?"

"Yes, certainly, send for the doctor at once, Mrs. Craven," said Raymond, taking upon himself to answer her last question; "and if you will give me his address, I will call on him on my return, for having deposited Mr. Northland into your safe keeping, my business here is over."

"Norreys," said Gus Northland, who had now partially recovered from the faintness occasioned by his being moved, "you mustn't go; you must stay."

"I cannot, indeed," said poor Raymond; "it is impossible; my business——"

"It must wait for mine," repeated Cousin Gus. "I came down here to-night with one purpose, and I won't be disappointed of it, by Jove! Margaret, my dear, where is Rachel?"

Raymond started to hear his wife named thus familiarly by one who was nearly a stranger to her; still more so, when Mrs. Craven, instead of appearing astonished like himself, only exclaimed—

"Not now, dear Gus; oh! not now—wait till you are stronger; to-morrow will do as well—it will be too much for you in your present state of weakness."

But Cousin Gus was determined.

"*Now*," he said emphatically; "at once. I feel weaker every moment, Margaret, and I may never be stronger. I came down here to-night for this only, and by Jove it shall be done! Fetch Rachel to me."

Then Raymond, as in a dream, saw Mrs. Craven leave the room, and return with Rachel and her son; and still, as in a dream, heard Mr. Northland—"Cousin Gus," the dependent relative who lived at Craven Court on sufferance—say in a distinct voice, as he folded his weak arms round her—

"Raymond Norreys, this is *my daughter*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED.

This startling piece of intelligence falling like an electric shock on the ears of at least three of those who heard it, still appeared to affect them very differently.

Rachel, who had been taken so unexpectedly into the embrace of Mr. Northland that she had no time to remonstrate, burst from it again, with an energy which almost amounted to violence, as she turned with blazing eyes and confronted Mrs. Craven, and the question, Is this true? came vehemently from her parted lips.

Cecil, who had grown very pale when his cousin spoke, started forward ejaculating—

"Cousin Gus! Good Heavens! it is impossible!" whilst his mother, apparently unable to meet the eyes of either of them, buried her face in the bedclothes, repeating, in a burst of grief, "Oh! dearest Gus! why didn't you put it off until to-morrow? I asked you to put it off until to-morrow."

But Raymond Norreys had been so utterly unprepared for the disclosure, and, although he listened to the various phrases used, attached so little meaning to their import, that he appeared the least moved of any at the scene which was being acted before him. Standing apart, with folded arms, and lip that had curled proudly at the entrance of his wife, he no more believed what he had heard than the others dared to disbelieve it. Mr. Northland had travelled to Brighton by rail, against the advice of the profession, and his head was suffering in consequence. He was mad—they were all mad together, excepting, indeed, himself. So he argued as he quietly stood still, and was the only incredulous one there.

Presently the voice of Mr. Northland was heard again —

"It is better so, Margaret; it's over now, and I'm deucedly glad of it. I received your letters, my dear, and was hurrying down here to-day, with quite another purpose in my head—quite another purpose, by Jove! when the accident happened; and then, as I lay crushed beneath the carriages, thinking every minute would be my last, I seemed to see the extent of my selfishness (of the selfishness of my whole life). It came before me as clear as day, and I swore I wouldn't sleep until I had done as you asked me, and acknowledged my daughter before the world; and now I've done it, by Jove!"

"Oh! no, dear Gustavus," sobbed Mrs. Craven, "not selfish; don't say that; always the best and the kindest of men."

Good and kind he may have, and doubtless had been, but weak and erring to a degree, and on his deathbed Gustavus Northland knew it for a truth. He was about to silence his cousin, and beg her not to flatter him, when Raymond's voice was heard.

"Mrs. Craven," it said, "are we to take

this communication on Mr. Northland's part as a pleasantry, or a fact? Because, if the latter, you are keeping us in unnecessary suspense."

"He is right, by Jove," said the wounded man. "Margaret, tell them the rest."

Then Mrs. Craven rose from her kneeling attitude, and seeing three pair of eyes turned expectantly towards her, looked like a stag brought to bay by its pursuers. Still more so, when she reared her head almost defiantly, shook her hair away from her forehead, and said, gazing steadily forwrd the while—

"It is a fact; you know it all now—Rachel Norreys is the daughter of Gustavus Northland and myself. I have been his wife for the last four-and-twenty years."

"His *wife!*" cried Rachel, springing to her side. "Oh! Mrs. Craven, say those words again!"

"His *wife!*" re-echoed the voice of her son. "Thank God, mother! I can stand anything now," and he tried to take her in his arms. But she turned from him and from Rachel, and threw her arm round the nerve-

less form of Gustavus Northland, as though she would shelter him from even their reproaches.

"Oh! of what have they suspected me?" she exclaimed. "Gustavus! what have my children been thinking of me?"

"Nothing but what might have been expected from the complication of evils my conduct has brought upon you, Margaret," he replied. "But cheer up, my dear, it's over now."

"*Mother*," said Rachel, faintly, as she touched Mrs. Craven on the arm; "mother (whom I have known for mine for so many silent, heartbreaking months), will you not speak to me? Will you not acknowledge me for your child?"

"My darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, as she turned and caught the girl fondly in her embrace. "My only daughter, my heart has yearned over you, Rachel, ever since we have been separated; and the hardest trial in my life has been my inability to acknowledge you as my best possession. Gus, dear, give her your blessing. This is the first time, since the hour of her

birth, that we have been permitted to say together and openly, 'God bless our child.'"

"You all seem to be coming to a very comfortable understanding between yourselves," interposed Raymond Norreys, who felt more and more mystified as the various greetings were given and acknowledged; "but you seem to have forgotten that I may require a little information as to the reason that I now hear the lady, whom I always knew, and married as the daughter of Dr. Browne, addressed as the daughter of Mr. Northland. I am perfectly in the dark, and feel I have as good a right as any one to demand some explanation of the mystery."

"Of course," exclaimed Cecil. "Mother, this news has been long enough delayed already, God knows! Make short work of it now, and let us hear all there is to hear."

"Directly, Cecil, directly," she replied. "Mr. Norreys, I ought to apologize to you, I suppose, but in the first excitement of such a confession you must make allowances

for our not having eyes or ears for any one but our immediate selves. I hope that the miserable misunderstandings which have cropped up amongst us lately will be fully accounted for, when you have heard my history. My name is Margaret Northland—Rachel and Cecil are brother and sister."

"Good God!" exclaimed Raymond, as the thought of all the misery the want of such knowledge had occasioned, flashed upon his mind. "Rachel! why did you not tell me of this before?"

But although he appealed to her thus directly, Rachel turned away from him, and professed to be occupied with something relating to the comfort of her newly-found father.

"Because her lips were sealed by an oath," answered Mrs. Craven, quickly, "which Rachel, to save her happiness even, dared not break. Oh! Raymond, could you have trusted her, things might have been different; but I do not blame you. Circumstances were brought, by the treachery of that woman, so strongly against them

both, that I feel *I* am the only one open to censure in the matter."

"No, Margaret, by Jove! you are not," said the feeble voice of her husband; "it was for love of me you did it."

"*I* am the only one to blame," repeated Mrs. Craven. "Cecil, my dearest boy, don't look at me like that. I have greatly wronged you both. God knows that I repent of it this day."

With her eyes fixed upon her son, and addressing herself to him, as if he of all those present, most demanded explanation and reparation at her hands, Margaret Craven proceeded—

"I did not love your father, Cecil; and marrying him was the first wrong step in my career. I had loved my Cousin Gustavus before that, and pledged my faith to him; but neither of us had any money, and, therefore, we were told it could not be. Your father must have guessed at something of the truth, for when he died and left me free to choose again, I found, by his will, that in the event of a second marriage, every farthing of the jointure

he left me, as well as the property of Craven Court, was to pass from my hands into those of your guardians, and I was to be left penniless."

"It was a cruel will—an infamous will!" said Cecil, hotly, to whom his father was but a name, and the love of his mother a household word.

"Hush! dear," she replied; "a man has a right to do as he chooses with his own, and the infamy lay with those who tried to circumvent, by a dishonourable action, his dying wishes."

"That's me, by Jove!" interposed poor Cousin Gus.

"Not you, not you, my dearest," cried Mrs. Craven, flying to his side and folding him in her embrace, and then turning to her auditors, she continued—

"However blameworthy the remainder of my story may seem to be, however culpable the subsequent actions I have to relate, remember, that throughout, it was *my* thought and *my* doing. My husband there is blameless of everything, except of loving me too much."

Not one there present believed the generous lie; but they admired the nobility of purpose which had dictated it, and suffered it to pass unnoticed. Then she continued—

"When I was a widow, and we met again, we loved each other, if possible, better than before, and often lamenting over our inability to marry (both being so poor), we came at last to the proposal and carrying out, of a secret marriage. Oh! Cecil, I am so ashamed to tell you this part of my history; but you were such a child, I did not consider, in the furtherance of my own selfish designs, how forgetful I was of your interests. Can you ever forgive me?"

"If there is any need of my forgiveness, mother, above that of others," he replied, "you have it freely. But go on with your story, for we are impatient."

"We were married privately, and for a while there seemed no chance of our secret being discovered; but in the course of another year I found that I was likely to become a mother, and at first feared that everything must be disclosed. But amongst

my old admirers and most intimate friends was poor Alfred Browne, and to him, being a doctor, I at last, under a promise of secrecy, summoned courage to confess my dilemma. He was a single man, single (so he said) for my sake, and he not only promised to attend me during my confinement, but offered to take my infant and bring it up as his own. And when (whilst purporting to be away on a visit in the country) my little daughter was born, he did as we had agreed he should do; and carried off my baby and her nurse to his own home, and brought her up as his own. Yes, for *this*—for the sake of possessing a few luxuries and comforts, which have never brought me a moment's happiness, I consented to give up my daughter for life to the man whom she called 'father.'"

"He was a father, indeed, to me," murmured Rachel; "no one could have been dearer."

"You would not have loved your own father, probably, half so well," interposed Cousin Gus, dejectedly.

"Oh! don't say that," replied Rachel,

"How can you tell, since I never had the opportunity?" (And she reddened as she recalled the last interview she had had with him in the shrubbery, and the indignation she had then felt at his supposed liberty.) "And forgive me," she added, turning to Mrs. Craven, "that I have ever dared to have a thought with regard to yourself, that was not pure, and true, and honourable. I might have known my mother would be such."

"Forgive you, Rachel?" replied Mrs. Craven, mournfully; "it is your parents who should kneel for forgiveness to you this night, and have done so, in spirit, years ago. Alfred Browne then took my deserted little girl, and reared her as his own. He did not, at that time, belong to the 3rd Royal Bays. When he joined that corps, Rachel was several years old, and no one knew but that she was his own orphaned child. But since that time, I may truly say that I have led a miserable life; although I have been thankful to know, that through our means, my little girl enjoyed all the comforts and luxuries of

this world; yet her heart, the possession of which I so much coveted, I had given over into the keeping of another. And for *this*, for the knowledge that I had a husband I dared not own, and a daughter whom I dared not say I loved, I have borne a guilty, uneasy conscience, that has never lost sight, for one moment, of the fact that I was defrauding my son of his lawful possessions. Cecil, I have tried to make it up to you by a useless liberality; but that is no excuse for me. Henceforward, of course, Craven Court and the income which goes with it, will belong to you alone. I know you will not be hard, my dearest boy, in pressing demands which you might justly claim of me; but if I go to jail for it, from this day my name is Margaret Northland, and my place is by the side of my acknowledged husband. Would to God, I had never been tempted to do other than acknowledge him! But it was for your sake, dear Gustavus—Heaven knows it was, and for yours only." And then, the recital of her shame and sin concluded, the unhappy woman sank down, overpowered, by his side.

Cecil was the next to speak.

"Mother," he said frankly, "you know me too well, I hope, to think that *I* should press demands upon you or your husband, so let that pass. You have made me so happy to-night by the confession that your name is Northland, and that my sister Rachel is the child of wedded parents, that I can only thank Heaven for the knowledge, and think any means cheap, by which I have arrived at it."

"Cecil, how could you think otherwise?" his mother said, reproachfully.

"How could I *not* think otherwise, you mean, mother. Judge for yourself. You placed me in Browne's regiment with a wish, I now presume, that my sister and myself should become intimate friends."

"He promised me—Alfred promised me—that he would further your intimacy by every means in his power," she interposed eagerly.

"Under the circumstances, it was scarcely wise, perhaps," he answered shortly; "however, we need not discuss the matter now; he fulfilled his promise to you. Watching

together one day by Browne's death-bed, he (being partially delirious at the time) told us that he was not Rachel's father, and that we were brother and sister. At first, naturally, we disbelieved him; but afterwards, on pressing him (when more sensible) for an explanation of his words, he became alarmed at the information we had acquired, and whilst admitting its truth, refused steadfastly to tell us any more, and further, bound us by a most solemn oath, repeated again in the last hour of his life, that we should never reveal what he had said to any one, or under any circumstances, as we hoped for Heaven. What could we think after that? I appeal to all here. Rachel was my sister—I was her brother, but we had no means of discovering anything further. Mother, what *could* we think, excepting that a great sin lay at your door, and that Rachel was a child you were ashamed to own? and that belief bound us closer together, perhaps, than, under ordinary circumstances, we should have been; for I felt that the day might possibly arrive when

she would have no counsellor or protector but myself."

And Cecil scowled (as much as it was possible for his soft blue eyes and fair eyebrows to scowl) at Raymond Norreys, who still stood, apart and silent, with strange feelings of remorse and self-reproach stirring in his breast, and making it throb with a sensation not unakin to pain, as the words he listened to, rendered the dark past every moment clearer and more distinct.

"But only knowing you to be my *mother*," now pleaded the thrilling voice of Rachel, "I have felt towards you all the depth and fulness of a daughter's love, notwithstanding the misery that I have experienced from the knowledge of the stigma (which I supposed to rest) upon my birth. I will not say that I have never remembered it, except to pity you and myself for having been forbid by fate to comfort one another by mutual affection. I will not say that I have never unwished myself your child, or thought of you and my unknown father without feelings of the deepest reverence and love, because I have suffered very

deeply during my short lifetime, and suffering is hard to bear in secret and alone. I have been brought up by the most indulgent of guardians, and permitted to be wild and wayward from my youth, and, perhaps, too inconsequent of the result of any action upon which I had set my mind; but I can lay my hand upon my heart, and truly say, that in all my doubts and fears; in the anxious suspense that the secret knowledge of my birth has given me, and the cruel suspicion under which it has lately thrown me, I have never harboured such regret for myself—I have never shed such tears for my own sufferings, as I have done for the shame and disgrace of which my unhappy birth (or so I imagined) must have been to you the cause."

Speaking thus—her beaming eyes fixed upon the face of Mrs. Craven—her sympathetic voice falling and rising, in mellow cadence with the spirit of her words—how Raymond, gazing upon Rachel's animated features, drank in every tone she uttered, and infinitely longed to rush forward, and, falling at her feet, implore her to turn the

same glances upon him, if only for a moment! How, when he saw Mrs. Craven throw her arms about the graceful, drooping figure, and lay her weary, conscience-stricken head upon the throbbing breast, did he sigh that the same shelter were open to his embrace—the same pillow to his aching head! But Rachel's mother, answering her, he still stood listening in silent anxiety, as if he expected to hear some hope for himself issue from her lips.

"My dearest Rachel," she said, "I feel that what you say is true, because I know your worth, my dear. I knew it long before we met this time, from the assurances of my dear old friend. Throughout your life (though you were unaware of it) I have felt most deeply with you. At the time of your hasty marriage——"

("Ah!" exclaimed Rachel, and the exclamation was so like the offspring of a sudden pang, that Raymond's heart stood still to hear it.)

"—— In all your little troubles, or your childish illnesses, there have always been anxious hearts at home to learn the upshot

and the issue of them all. You believe it, do you not?"

"I do," she answered. "Let me prove it to you, mother, by the remainder of my life. I ask nothing better than to stay by your side, and show you what a daughter's love can be."

But Raymond was spared the pain of hearing these last words, for as the women were whispering to, and caressing one another, Cecil Craven had approached him, and, with his usual frank generosity, been the first to extend the hand of reconciliation.

"Norreys," he said, "you have heard everything. I suppose to-night sees all this misery set right again. You have, I know, no personal enmity towards myself, and you will not refuse my hand, since we are brothers."

The other's grasp went out with immediate cordiality, and clasped his in a firm pressure.

"I hope you know me too well to doubt it, Craven, and sufficient of the circumstances under which this misunderstanding arose, to justify me in my suspicion and

demand of an explanation. But as to this night setting matters right again, I doubt if a lifetime will do that."

"My dear fellow, what do you mean?" asked Cecil Craven, in astonishment.

"Look at Rachel," was the reply; "watch her face when I speak to her, and tell me then, if with so much inherent pride in her nature, there is any reason to hope that she will ever forgive me for even suspecting her."

Cecil did look, and thought the aspect of affairs appeared unpromising, particularly as his mother seemed to be urging Rachel to some step to which a haughty refusal was plainly depicted in her face. But glancing round, he saw something else which diverted him from his former observation. Gustavus Northland, whom they all seemed (in the engrossing nature of their mutual conferences) to have for the while forgotten, was lying back upon his pillows, appearing, now that the excitement of telling the story of his daughter's birth was over, considerably worse for the reaction.

"Mother," exclaimed Cecil, directing her attention to the fact, "look at——at your husband. This has been too much for him; we had best send for Sherard at once."

"I said so, from the first," exclaimed Raymond. "Give me the address, Mrs. Craven, and I will go for him directly."

He felt restless and out of place amongst them, and longed to be actively employed. Mrs. Craven at first demurred about giving him such trouble, but it was no moment for ceremony. Mr. Northland was evidently becoming much worse, and she was unwilling for her son to leave her, and so with a few words of gratitude to Raymond, she directed his steps to the medical man's house, and in another minute he was clear of the Marine Parade, and on his way to summon Dr. Sherard.

CHAPTER IX.

PRIDE BOLTS THE DOOR AGAINST HAPPINESS.

STRIDING along in the keen night air, Raymond Norreys felt his hot heart burn within him as he recalled the past interview; the revelations of which it had been the occasion; and above all, the glorious, never-to-be-forgotten fact, that Rachel was innocent! Yes! if he was doomed never to call her really his; never to feel her heart throbbing against his own; to hear her lips repeat those blessed words, which now came back to him with feelings of intoxicating delight, "Raymond, *I love you*," still he would die the happier for knowing that *his* love, his wife, the only woman who had ever cost him more than a passing sigh, was pure,

and innocent, and undefiled, as she, on whom such love was staked, should be. Lost in thoughts like these, he arrived at Dr. Sherard's in a state of such excitement, that that worthy philanthropist, attributing his manner to his apprehension of the danger in which Mr. Northland lay, made the circumstance an extra reason for immediately turning out of his warm bed into the cold night air, and hastening to the relief of the patient. But when he arrived at the Marine Parade, alas! there was little left for him to do. Twelve hours, or more, had then elapsed since the occurrence of the accident, and he found the internal wounds of the injured man in a state of high inflammation, which, aggravated as it had been by the railway travelling and subsequent agitation, was beyond his power to subdue. All through that night, whilst Dr. Sherard sat by his bedside, vainly attempting to mitigate his sufferings, poor Gus Northland lay delirious and in the extremest pain, as he alternately called on his daughter not to curse him, or pitifully implored his wife to say that the selfishness

of his life, in accepting her offer to live upon her means and imperil her fame, had not been a little, just a little atoned for, by the last act of which he had been capable.

"I've set it all right, by Jove!" he would mutter between his wilder ravings, the old monotonous asseveration sounding so sadly familiar as it fell from his fevered lips—"I cheated the doctors. I did, by Jove! and it's all right now. Margaret, tell me that it's all right."

His doctor said that there would be a great interval of pain by-and-by, to be followed (but this he kept to himself for the present) by a longer interval still, an interval of everlasting rest, never to be again broken. But this was not made known at first, to the unprofessional watchers by the sick bed.

They were reduced by that time to their original number, for Raymond Norreys had left them again, long before the morning, and taken his solitary way back to London. Not without an attempt, though, to conciliate Rachel—not without a few

words exchanged with the woman who called herself his wife.

For having returned from his mission to fetch Dr. Sherard, he had deliberately sought an interview with her, and obtained it. Had he any hope in so doing? He must have had, else why did his cheeks flush as he found himself in her presence, and his dark eyes glow with excitement as he waited in expectation of her speaking to him first. Yet in vain; for though her features still bore traces of the exciting scene she had passed through, and she distinctly heard her husband enter, she never raised her head, or showed further signs of emotion at his approach, beyond the nervous movement of her graceful hands, which never ceased from the moment that he stood before her to cross and re-cross each other, interlacing the delicate fingers in their action. She was sitting in the drawing-room, where she had retreated on the doctor's arrival, and was alone. As Raymond caught sight of the determination pictured in her face, he crossed the threshold boldly, and closing the door behind

him, set his back against it, as if to resent the possibility of their being disturbed.

And yet Rachel, guessing his identity by the quicker beating of her heart, no less than by the hardihood of his mute approach, still would not look upward for fear of encountering his glance, but remained as he had found her, leaning over the table with an opened book before her, in which the printed characters were blurred and indistinct, and kept on changing their places, more and more rapidly, as his agitated voice fell on her ear.

"Rachel! I am going away."

Still her lips never moved, only the restless pretty fingers continued their irritating play.

"Do you hear me, Rachel?" he repeated; "I am going back to town."

Then she lifted her head slowly from her pretended occupation, and said, yet carefully avoiding his eye the while—

"Are you?"

"I had hoped you would have had something more to say to me than that," he urged. "What I have heard this night with

respect to the relationship existing between Craven and yourself, and your knowledge of it, whilst it cannot make me regret the tone I assumed at our last interview (because, whilst resting under the same belief, I should be compelled to act in a similar manner to-night), has still had the power to make me deeply deplore the unhappy necessity which prevented you from telling me the whole truth. If I used words to you that night, Rachel, which rankle in your heart now, I ask your pardon for them, and your forgetfulness if you can give it me."

"I have nothing to forgive," she replied. "Under the circumstances, I have no doubt you were quite right to act as you did. It was unfortunate, nothing more."

"Nothing more, Rachel?"

There was such pathos in his voice as he put the question, that her courage sank beneath it. *She* knew how much more—she knew what misery she had felt in that separation; what magnitude her passionate love for him had seemed to acquire from each day of absence. But he had refused

it. She had laid it at his feet with so many tears—with so much abandonment of feeling, and he had cast it from him. He had thrust it away—he had told her to give it to the next man (the *next*, good heavens!) who would care to take it from her. He for whose sake, to try and clear herself in whose sight, she had beaten down her worst assailant—pride, had insulted and stung her on her tenderest and most vulnerable point; and the evil spirit had gone out and brought in seven other spirits worse than himself, and they sat and kept high holiday in Rachel's breast that night. They, not she, now answering for her, said,

"Nothing more! Resting under such a suspicion, I could not any longer share your home, your protection, to both of which I have felt, ever since our ill-fated meeting, that I have no claim. Therefore, I came to those on whom I have such, from whom I may take the necessaries of life, and not feel the obligation weightier than their curse."

"But now—am I to leave you here, Rachel?"

"Leave me here!" she echoed vehemently. "Why not? Can you take me anywhere where I shall forget? Here, at least, they do not suspect me, have never suspected me, they take my love and do not spurn the gift." And as she spoke, overcome with the remembrance of her sorrow and her shame, Rachel's face crimsoned, and she burst into tears.

But Raymond's hot blood could no longer stand her insinuations with patience, and his next words were as vehement as her own.

"Who suspects you now?" he almost shouted—"who could have avoided it before, Rachel? Do you know that I can *compel* you to return with me to the Abbey Lodge?" She lifted her wet face then, and met, for the first time, his glowing eyes. She could, had she followed the dictates of her woman's nature, have knelt before him in that hour, and laid his foot upon her neck, so entirely did her heart own him for its lord; but the seven spirits were pressing hard upon her, as her love and womanhood fought feebly against them for a moment,

and then sunk down again wounded (though not to death), unable for this time to prove victor.

"I know you *could*," she said faintly, "but you would scarcely care, I fancy, to have my contempt as well as—as—my indifference."

"What did you say?" he demanded, in so loud a tone that it frightened her, yet she repeated her words at his request, although it was with the same bravado that makes a man risk his life because he is dared to do so.

Then Raymond's voice grew harsh and thick, and as if there was something in his throat which he could not swallow.

"That is all you have to say to me?" he said after a pause.

Very distinct his words were, although he had grasped the door handle as though to steady his frame.

"All," she whispered after a slight hesitation.

"Then here let our interviews on this side the grave end," he exclaimed, angrily,

as he passed hastily through the door, and closed it with a slam behind him.

As the sound struck her ear, Rachel started suddenly to her feet (she had preserved a sitting position hitherto), and pressed forward. For one moment she could scarcely believe that he was gone; for the next, that he would not return. Had he done so, he would have found the woman, whom he had left apparently so indifferent as to whether he stayed or went, standing in the centre of the room, with one hand pressed against her labouring bosom, as though she would stay its throbs, whilst she listened for some token of his return, with eyes wildly open and lips parted, and a look very like the coldness of despair creeping over her features, as the moments succeeded each other, and yet the door remained as he had left it. Worse still, for she now heard his footsteps distinctly descend the stairs, and reach the hall below. Only fearing she should lose him, as he threatened, for ever, already repenting of her affected disdain, Rachel sprung with one bound across the threshold to the landing

beyond. Thence she heard her husband's voice in the passage conferring with another, which she recognised as Cecil's. She tried to recall him—her head was whirling with the revulsion of feeling, which the sudden remorse that had attacked her, occasioned—her whole form was trembling violently, as she grasped the balustrades for a support, but still her whitened lips essayed to speak the one word, "Raymond." Twice it issued thence—not loudly, for the door of the adjacent bed-room stood half open, and she feared to attract the notice of those within it; not loudly, because her tongue was dry, and when she tried to render her voice clearer by swallowing, no moisture softened her throat, but in a distinct whisper, hard to listen to, painful to pronounce, her husband's name twice sounded over the balustrades; but no answer came. He was talking rapidly, vehemently, with Cecil Craven, and in another minute the hall-door opened—a rush of cold night air poured into the house —and then it closed again, and one pair of feet (she knew them to be Cecil's) com-

menced to reascend the staircase; but before she could see him to communicate her wishes or her distress, Rachel saw and heard no more.

Raymond Norreys himself, dashing down the stairs and through the hall, had run his head against that of Cecil Craven.

"Holloa!" exclaimed the other, "where are you off to?"

"I am going back to town," said Raymond; "at least, I am going to the station, and shall wait there for the first train. I can be of no use here, and urgent business waits me at home."

"And what about your wife?"

"She will not return with me," he answered excitedly. "Craven, I do not believe she ever will return to me. That cursed pride has set itself up to such a degree between us, that if I were to humble myself in the dust before her, I believe that, womanlike, she would only delight in crushing me still more."

"Hang it! I'd *make* her," replied Cecil, alluding to Rachel's return to her husband's protection.

"Not if you loved her as I do," said Raymond, in a low voice, and then stopped.

Men are shy of speaking to one another of their love for a woman, particularly when that love is true and deep, and unreturned.

"However, let that pass," he added presently, in a more cheerful tone; "I have news for you, Craven, and for Rachel also, which I wish you would tell her after my departure."

"All right; what is it?"

Then Raymond quickly detailed the circumstances of his altered fortunes and his newly-acquired title; and Cecil Craven shook his hand heartily as he congratulated him upon the same.

"There's not a man in the world I would sooner have heard it of, than yourself, Norreys," he said warmly, "and that's the truth. A thousand congratulations, old fellow; of course you'll throw up the navy at once. And as to this other business, it will all come right in time, depend upon it."

Raymond shook his head, but said nothing.

"I intend running over to Egham Priory to-morrow," added Cecil, in parting, "to set matters straight with my fiancée, for of course, however unpleasant for her, we cannot, for our own sakes, keep this business of my mother's marriage, a secret from the world. I shall look you up in town on my return. In the meanwhile, good-bye, old fellow, and keep up your spirits."

And then Raymond Norreys unclasped his brotherly hand, and went forth alone (except for that heavy burden pressing on his heart) into the pitiless unsympathising night.

But when Cecil Craven, burning to retail the news he had just heard, had reached, by rapid strides, the top stair of the lofty narrow flight, he found his sister, the newly-made Lady Norreys, fainted on the landing.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Northland (as we must henceforth call her), and Dr. Sherard, were engaged watching by the side of their delirious patient, and Sir Raymond Norreys having caught the earliest morning train, was flying back to London. How long the past day appeared in retro-

spect to him, as he lay back on the carriage cushions, and had nothing to do but to ponder n it! So many unforeseen events had crowded themselves into twenty-four hours, that he could hardly believe that only that space of time had elapsed since he walked into the Haymarket café, and recognised the murdered form of poor Tom White. And now, there were two of them gone, and a third likely, from all appearances, to follow. Well! after all, it was nothing more than had happened to others, from the same fatal cause. At the station Raymond had procured an evening paper, with an account of the railway accident, and a list of the killed and wounded. Fourteen of the first, of the latter, sixteen; altogether a goodly number. And amongst the killed, he here read of three and four belonging to the same family, and of them, two were girls in the very blush of youthful promise. There were worse cases apparently than those of men who had lived out the best part of their days. A little further down the list, was the description of a child, name unknown—had been placed under the care of

the guard, age apparently about four years, dressed in a tartan plaid frock, &c.; had on a comforter and muffatees of white and red wool, knitted by hand. As he read the description, Raymond remembered the poor woman who had been so anxious to learn the fate of her little child, and shuddered as he thought this might be the one she had asked for. "Comforter and muffatees, knitted by hand." Could the poor mother have made them herself, and sent them to be worn on this particular homeward journey, for fear her little one should feel the cold whilst travelling? A little thing to muse upon, but it attracted Raymond's attention, and set him thinking upon the troubles of other people, until he felt more reconciled to the contemplation of his own. He had plenty of work before him, not to say excitement, and as the train rushed into the Waterloo station again, he felt that he should have very little leisure for the next few days, to brood over the fresh disappointment that he had experienced.

Of course, when he walked into the presence of his mother and sister, that morning,

with the astounding news upon his tongue, that by the two accidental deaths of the day before, he had become Sir Raymond Norreys, and that Gustavus Northland turning out to be the father of his wife, had removed the suspicion which had rested on her character with regard to Cecil Craven, they were nearly prostrated by the double intelligence. That her son should by such unexpected means have inherited the baronetcy and estates of Woolcombe Rise, was, to Mrs. Norreys, so much a subject for congratulation and self-satisfaction, that she was nearly beside herself with pleasure, and could talk and think of nothing else. Raymond also was very full of what he should do, and where he should go, and how he should act, when he had entered into possession, and only Christine (after she had once wished her brother, joy of his good fortune) appeared to take no further interest in the future looming for them all.

"Why what has come to you, Christine?" remarked Raymond, presently; "you don't seem half so glad on my account as I thought you would be."

"No one could be more so, Raymond," she replied; "but if (as you say) Mrs. Craven's story has cleared up all the doubts that you had respecting Rachel, why is she not here with you? Why did not she return to Abbey Lodge when you did?"

Raymond looked suddenly grave again.

"That is more than I can tell you, Christine. I gave Rachel the option of doing so, but she refused to accompany me, and I shall not ask her again."

"But what were her reasons?" persisted Christine.

"God knows," he replied, sadly. "Rachel is one of those women who can never forgive an injury, however unintentional. I suppose that (although I had so good a cause for suspicion) she cannot bring herself to forget that I have suspected her, and her pride forbids her acknowledging that such is the case. She would have had me trust her implicitly, as I would an angel from heaven! through evil report and good report; but I am not saint enough to do it, whatever she may be to deserve it! And so the short interview we had, was very

stormy, and ended in her directly refusing to return of her own will to my protection. And that is all."

"Very reprehensible, indeed," put in Mrs. Norreys, with a feeble shake of the head, which the fact of her son being a baronet could not render altogether sad. "I am deeply grieved at Rachel's conduct, which is very wrong; very wrong, indeed."

"But I don't believe that that *is* all," exclaimed Christine, starting up with a vehemence which astonished her mother and brother. "There is more at the bottom of it than you have told us, Raymond, or than we can see. Rachel would never act so for a mere whim, or indulgence of so bad a feeling."

"Christine, my dear," said Mrs. Norreys, "you are forgetting yourself. Your brother must know best. This excitement on your part is very uncalled for."

"In this case I do not believe he knows best," still persisted the girl, her dark eyes beaming with generous ardour. "He loves Rachel more than I do, perhaps; but he

does not judge her so fairly. Raymond, is it not so? Does not your heart tell you that there is something else standing as a barrier between Rachel and yourself besides the justifiable suspicion you entertained for her?"

She repeated her question, but he did not answer. He stood conscience-stricken before her. Yes, he remembered only too well, how, when she had thrown herself upon his breast, cast her arms about him, and poured forth those passionate words, "Raymond, I love you; indeed, I do. I have been too foolish to tell you of it before; but, indeed, it is true"—he had untwined them roughly, those dear, tender arms, and thrust her from him, and told her to her face that she was false in even saying so. And as the recollection pressed upon him, Raymond Norreys felt as if, between love and regret and disappointment, he was going mad.

"Christine," he exclaimed, "for the sake of Heaven, cease to speak to me upon this subject! Whatever has been between my wife and me, is past. Whatever might have been, I believe to be also past. I

entreat you not to revive a recollection which almost drives me crazy, by questions such as these. Rest satisfied that whosoever is in fault, Rachel, of her own self, told me last night, that if I did not wish to win her contempt as well as her indifference, I should not urge her return to my protection. If after words like those you think I am the man to sue her humbly for what I could demand, you do not yet know how much pride there dwells in your brother's heart. When she wishes to come back to me, Heaven is my witness how gladly I shall open my arms to receive her; till then, Christine, all I ask of you on the subject is—silence."

And after this demand on Raymond's part, neither his mother or his sister dared to give him for the present anything else.

The next week passed actively enough. There was of course a great deal to do preparatory to his entering upon the possession of Woolcombe Rise; but although Messrs Packer and Milbury tried hard to thrust as many obstacles as they could in the way, and to swell their bill to the

greatest extent known amongst lawyers, they could not, for all their sharpness, make the necessary legalities extend over more than a few days. By the time that the arrangements for the pompous funerals of Sir Archibald and his son were completed, all the preliminary forms were over, and the undisputed heir was at liberty to walk into Woolcombe Hall, and dispense his own orders. For the present they were few; for his mother refused, on any account, to leave the Abbey Lodge, and Sir Raymond had no wish to reign in solitary, miserable splendour, on his new domain; he therefore chose to remain his mother's guest, until affairs were a little more settled between his wife and himself. In the meanwhile, having sent in his resignation of the service to the Admiralty, the papers to that effect were being made out, at their leisure, by that slow and steady company.

But one day, during that week (it was the day after the funerals at Woolcombe Rise), a black-edged letter came from Brighton for Sir Raymond Norreys.

"Poor Northland's gone," he said, to his

mother and sister, in explanation of its appearance. "His injuries resulted in mortification. Craven writes that he is going to the Court to attend the funeral, and wants me to join him there. Of course I must go."

"And Mrs. Northland?" inquired Christine.

"Remains at Brighton for the present," he replied. "Craven says she is dreadfully cut up by the loss."

"Nothing more?" his sister ventured presently to say.

"Nothing," he rejoined. "What more do you want?"

She had hoped there would have been a word about Rachel, but, if so, Raymond did not choose to mention it.

After Mr. Northland's funeral, Major Craven returned to Brompton with Raymond Norreys.

"Craven and I are going down into Berkshire, to-morrow," the latter said, in explanation, "as I want to show him the place before he returns to Brighton."

"Does your mother make any stay at

Brighton, Major Craven?" inquired Mrs. Norreys of Cecil.

"Only a few weeks," he replied. "She is naturally shy of returning to the Court, whilst her story is so very fresh. I wish I could have avoided the publicity, for her sake, but it was impossible, particularly as the estate devolves upon me. Raymond and I are very important men, now, Mrs. Norreys—are we not?"

"Very much so," she replied. "I hope that you will each feel, as well as say so, for a great responsibility rests upon you both. I suppose you will be getting a wife next, Major Craven?"

"As soon as I can," he answered, smiling; "but, of course, this mourning for my step-father must put all such things off for a few months; but I have been down to Egham Priory, and, notwithstanding Lady Riverdale's horror at my poor mother's iniquity, have quite satisfied her scruples, as far as concerns myself, for Lady Frances is coming to stay with us at Brighton the week after next. My mother wants me to follow Norreys' example, and cut my profession;

but I am rather prouder of my coat than he is, and will not hear of it, though I am afraid there will be no more foreign service for me after marriage."

A great deal more talk of the same kind, but not one word of Rachel—not even an allusion to her. Had Raymond sealed Major Craven's lips, as he had done their own? Christine watched and hoped in vain, no one started the subject, and so she lay wait for Cecil Craven, after dinner, in the hall, and seizing a favourable opportunity, caught him alone, and breathlessly made the inquiry of him—

"Major Craven, excuse my stopping you, but have you nothing to tell me about my—my sister, Rachel?"

"Your sister! Good heavens! Miss Norreys, do you really regard her as a sister? I am so glad to hear it. Let us go into the dining-room; I should so like to speak to you about it."

And when he turned to face her, beneath the gaslight, he saw her eyes were full of tears; thereupon, he grasped her hand—

"How good of you!" he said; "I see

you feel for her. What is this wretched quarrel between them, Miss Norreys? I have sounded Rachel, and I have sounded your brother, but all I can extract from either of them is, that there is some barrier between them that can never be displaced, and that the kindest thing I can do, is not to ask any questions on the subject."

"Just what Raymond says to us," replied Christine; "and more, for he has positively forbidden our speaking of his wife. But tell me one thing, Major Craven—you are in your sister's confidence, I know—does she love my brother?"

"I am *sure* of it," replied Cecil, "although she has never told me so; but I can see it from her present depression and utter avoidance of his name. And with regard to him?"

"He *worships* her," said Christine, eagerly. "I believe he would lay down his life for her. What shall we do, Major Craven? This misery must not go on."

"Of course not," he replied; "it *shan't* go on. Miss Norreys, it strikes me you are the very person to bring

them together again. You must write to Rachel."

"Do you think it will be of any good?" she asked timidly.

"It cannot do any harm," he answered. "A brick wall could not divide them more effectually than they are now divided. Do try, Miss Norreys; this business cannot make you more unhappy than it does me."

"I will, indeed," she said. "Thank you for the advice."

"Thank *you* for all your goodness," he replied; "you are just the sister I could have wished Rachel to possess."

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTINE.

The time at Brighton that followed the death of poor Gus Northland was a very trying time for all concerned in it. Cecil Craven had gone to Egham Priory, as he had proposed, the day after the accident, leaving his mother's husband very ill, certainly, but not (as was then thought by all except the doctor) in any danger; but on the second day of his sojourn there, he had been recalled to Brighton by an urgent telegram from his mother, and had only returned to find Mr. Northland insensible, in which state he continued till he died.

The shock to his poor wife was extreme. Deeply as she had sympathised and felt

with him from the first, in his acute sufferings, she had fully imagined that a few hours of pain and anxiety would see him easy again, and herself with nothing to do but to nurse him into perfected health. This weak, selfish man, with the handsome face, and the soft, foolish brown eyes, who had been her first love, and to the influence of her affection for whom, she had obstinately made her own stronger will succumb (as we sometimes see clever people in this life worshipping fools), how infinitely dearer he seemed to her, now that he lay on a bed of pain, and had acknowledged his wife and his daughter before the world. That which, to less blinded eyes, appeared a very feeble act of justice, and not worthy to be called an atonement for a long course of egregious selfishness (unbefitting the name of man), served, in her distorted vision, to raise her weak husband to a god-like eminence, before the dignity of which she was ready to prostrate herself.

Whilst Margaret Northland, in the first excitement of knowing that she could once more walk amongst her fellow-creatures,

and not feel afraid to lift up her head for fear her heavy secret should be read upon her face, was debasing herself (if pure love can ever be debased) by exalting the puerile conduct of Gustavus Northland into something worthy of more than mortal nature, and deriving her best comfort from the thought of how she would make amends to him for his generous relinquishment of luxuries to which he had never possessed the smallest right, by years of devotion and wifely servitude, the cruel inflammation, which had held him in such torture, was gradually subsiding, only to give place to a deadlier enemy, and one which no art can subdue. When she thought that his pain was over at last, and had already thanked Heaven for the relief accorded to him, she had to bear the greater pain herself, of hearing that hope for this life was over. Then, indeed, did she lament that the troubles of *her* daughter—the grief, which never could have come upon any of them, excepting as the consequence of her own guilty secret—had been the means of bringing a premature and

violent death upon the creature she most loved in this world. Yes, if Margaret Northland ever experienced remorse for the past, and a wild wish to blot out life and remembrance together, it was during those first few hours in which she knew that she and her early lover were to be parted for ever.

What wonder that in such a moment even Rachel was forgotten. But the shock once over, the last few half-sensible words uttered, the last feeble breath drawn, and all that was earthly of her erring husband, hidden out of her sight, Margaret Northland turned to Rachel for especial comfort. She was *his* child—*his* legacy, the daughter he had acknowledged with his dying breath; had even died to acknowledge, and she should be all the world henceforward to her heartbroken mother. In those days, Mrs. Northland neither spoke of Raymond Norreys, nor urged his wife's return to him. She was too eager to keep Rachel by her own side, too occupied in dilating on the early history of her dead father to her; in dwelling tenderly on the story of her

own love for him, of his youthful beauty, his goodness, his faith to herself. And although Rachel (not having shared her mother's love for Mr. Northland) could not quite agree with all she now heard in favour of his various admirable qualities, still this lingering on the virtues of the dead man, bore something very touching in its simplicity for her nature, and raising the narrator in her estimation, gave her daily a deeper claim upon her love. But although it seemed natural in the first days of her second widowhood that her daughter should be by her side, Mrs. Northland was not so selfish as to entirely forget that Rachel had also her troubles, and that the horizon of her young life, was not, at that moment, entirely unclouded. She had determined, as Cecil said, to stay for a few weeks longer at the seaside. It was impossible that her son could take legal possession of what should have been his from a child, and herself assume her rightful name, and publicly acknowledge her daughter, without a great many remarks being made, and comments passed upon her con-

duct, which, determined as she now was to face the consequences of her fault, Mrs. Northland could not yet quite contemplate enduring without a shudder. And therefore, until all lawyers' business was concluded, and the facts made thoroughly known, it was thought better the widow should continue in retirement. But the excitement attendant on her father's death and burial, and her mother's first grief, over, Rachel seemed to loathe Brighton, and all it contained. If they remained shut up at home, she was restless and unquiet, roaming from room to room, and from one occupation to another, as if she could find no rest for the sole of her foot, or employment to satisfy her eager mind. But if, anxious to vary the scene for her daughter, Mrs. Northland forced herself to go out driving, and to mix against her own will with the gay crowd of equipages that daily thronged the principal thoroughfares, Rachel seemed just as much to shun the gaze of strangers as she did her own company. The fact is, she was wretched; she loathed the sound of the sea, which never

varied its monotonous tones, but went on splashing and moaning—rolling in or rolling out, whether human hearts were breaking or rejoicing; she loathed the various antics of the crowd of performers that always appeared to settle just before their windows; she hated the music of the numerous German bands, whether discordant or otherwise; she fled from the importunities of hawkers, ballad-singers, and beggars, as if the world were combining against her alone, and with a degree of temper to which Rachel, however prone, seldom gave way for such trivial occasions. And when she was not cross, or appeared to be so, she was despondent. Hour after hour, she would sit with idly folded hands, gazing out upon the water (unless one of the offenders before mentioned, drove her from the situation), with apparently no object in her head, except so to sit and think. Her mother noticed her moods, and pointed them out to Cecil on his return, and both attempted to approach the subject of her grief with her; but Rachel, far from admitting a comforter or confidant into the

secrets of her bosom, became so violently agitated whenever they appeared to wish to gain her confidence, that for the present they thought it better to let her have her own way. She had been told of her husband's sudden accession to wealth and honour, but the news had not seemed to materially affect her. Indeed, in her own mind, it appeared to raise a higher barrier between them than before, for if she retreated from her resolution after hearing that, would he not think that she did, for the sake of sharing his worldly aggrandisement, what she could not be moved to do for the promise of himself? And so the unnatural state of mind in which my heroine was at that period, actually led her to consider the good fortune which had befallen Raymond as an additional aggravation of her own trouble, and there was nothing she disliked more than hearing herself called by the name of "Lady Norreys." But of the movements and actions of her husband she was kept in full knowledge, for Cecil never spared an opportunity of sounding his name in her ears, generally accompanied by some

praise of its owner. At such times Rachel would colour painfully, and look at her brother with reproach in her eyes; but Cecil, dearly as he loved her, never chose to take the least notice of such glances on her part, but went on manfully in laudation of some sentiment or exploit of his absent friend. But the second week died out, and then Lady Frances Morgan was expected; and early as it was for her visit, both Mrs. Northland and Major Craven looked forward to it with pleasure, as they hoped her society might do Rachel good, and her presence amongst them, make things appear a little more as they used to do in bygone days. But one day before Lady Frances arrived, there came a letter for Rachel which made her pulses beat quicker, for it bore the Brompton postmark, and was from Christine Norreys. She escaped to her own room when she had received it, and, tearing open the envelope, ran her eyes rapidly over its contents, as she hoped to see the name of the man she had come to yearn for news of, transcribed upon the page. And she was not (so far) disap-

pointed. Raymond's name appeared very often in his sister's letter, for she had written freely, and from the outspoken fulness of her heart. She did not disguise from Raymond's wife how unhappy the difference between them made her, their sister, nor how much she would give to see it healed again. But with this, with her own lamentations over the sad quarrel which divided them, and her own asseverations that she was certain that Raymond would be unhappy until it was settled, Christine's pen was fain to content itself. She dared not go further. She dared not make any promises, or give vent to any prophecies on her brother's account, and she had been charged with no messages from him. On the contrary, when she had told him her intention of writing to his wife, and timidly asked if he had anything he wished to have said from himself, Raymond had answered, in a tone forbidding all further parley, that if he desired to communicate with Rachel, he should do so of his own accord. And therefore poor Christine could only suggest what she

thought likely to happen, in the event of her sister-in-law seeking a reconciliation—and such suggestions Rachel would take no heed of. Even the stereotyped formality of "Mamma sends her love," at the close of the letter, was a generous fiction of Christine's brain, because she did not like to send a letter from the Abbey Lodge which did not contain her mother's name. But although Rachel disregarded the entreaties of Christine, and spurned her advice, and considered she was far more capable of deciding on the best management of her affairs than was her sister-in-law, the kind, affectionate letter did her good, and made her feel that all connection with the dear old Abbey Lodge was not yet entirely broken off. And there was one piece of news in it which, while it struck Rachel with surprise, might have made her feel still more kindly towards the writer of it, had she known what pain (notwithstanding that her desire not to aggravate her sister-in-law's troubles, made her mention it more lightly than she felt) she had suffered before she had it to relate. For in the

latter part of her epistle, and mentioned cursorily, as if she wished to draw as little attention as possible to the fact, Christine had said :—

"I do not know if you will be surprised or not, dear Rachel, to hear that my engagement with Mr. Macpherson is broken off. It seems strange to write of him so formally, after having been intimate with him for so long, but I am thankful now that it has been so, since it enabled me to discover that our tempers would have been certain to clash, had we persisted in the determination to pass our lives together. Therefore it is far better as it is."

"Our tempers," Christine had written, in her wish to the last to shield (as she had ever shielded) Alexander Macpherson's, from the censure of the world; but sweet as her own was, she had been unable to shut her eyes completely, to the misery which must eventually ensue, did she bring it in daily contact with that of the fiery-headed Scotchman. Her mental vision had been unfolding itself, for some time past, to the great disadvantages which it would

entail upon her future position as his wife. She had watched Alick Macpherson for some years, under various circumstances, in which his temper had been tried; some of them the most trivial, and yet, she could not remember one in which it had stood the test; and there had been periods when she had seen him so utterly lose command over himself, that whilst they called for her contempt, she could not look back upon them without shuddering. And, added to this, Alexander Macpherson had never ceased to be jealous of his *fiancée*. Not the foolish, but pardonable jealousy of a man very much in love, who grudges a look, or word, or smile, given to another, but yet is satisfied, on confession of his weakness, to receive meekly the playful, well-deserved rebuke, backed up immediately with a double allowance of favours to make it palateable. Such folly is folly, but still allowable. One cannot always be in love, and the happy time for it, passes only too soon. But Mr. Macpherson's jealousy was of another, and a meaner kind. It was jealousy that displayed itself with regard to Christine's

affection for her mother, for her brother, for her sister-in-law; even for her politeness to mere acquaintances. It was jealousy that could be roused if she differed from him in opinion; if she did not vaunt *his* preferences, his tastes, and his belongings, high above those of other people; and although Christine, at one time, dearly loved the man, and was quite ready to think more of him and his possessions, than she did of any one else's, she was still of an independent spirit that chafed at being laid under continual restraint, and of an honest spirit that scorned to say what she did not really think, even at the risk of offending so important a person as her lover. But the risk was run so often, and the offence given so often, that it almost grew at last to the fact, that Christine must do, and think, and say, exactly as he did, and thought, and said, or a quarrel arose between them. And, therefore, as the girl's love of honesty was not to be coerced, the quarrels became very frequent, and a source of great grief to her. She tried every method to live at peace with him. She gave in in all things where, with

truth, she could; she bent and twisted her own ideas, to try and make them keep pace with his. But it would have been as practicable to trap the God of Day himself, and, confining him within the glass shade of a gas-lamp, have expected him to remain there and shine, as to fetter the free spirit of Christine Norreys, until it had shrunk to the narrowed limits of Alexander Macpherson's opinions, and then expected it to live so and flourish. She came to the knowledge of this herself, at last, not suddenly, but by degrees, although the full conception of what her existence as his wife would be, burst on her like an inspiration.

She had been engaged to him so long, for nearly four years, and had arrived so gradually at the knowledge of all his weaknesses, and the chance of her marrying him was still such a remote one, that, although she had often wept over the constant disagreements that arose between them, and said that things could not go on like that for ever, the real truth, that her love for him was waning, did not appear to have been brought home to her until a few days

after Rachel had left the Abbey Lodge, and sought Mrs. Craven's protection. There had been some words between Christine and her lover on that occasion, resulting from his having expressed his opinion with regard to her sister-in-law's conduct rather freely, and she had not seen him for a couple of days. Then he appeared one afternoon, having apparently quite forgotten the coolness with which they had parted, to communicate some good news to Christine; which was, that having, by some good luck, or interest, or death (it is irrelevant to my story which), been raised to a considerably higher appointment in the War Office, he should be in future, in receipt of a salary which would enable him to fulfil his long engagement with her, and to make her his wife—as soon as ever she consented herself to become so.

"And now tell me when it shall be, Christine?" said Alexander Macpherson, as he finished his recital, and took the hand in his, which he imagined he should so soon call his own. She did not snatch it away, or start from his side, or do anything

vehement—it was not in her nature; she even let her hand lie as he had placed it, and simply said, in her own familiar voice—

"Alick, I have been thinking of the probabilities of our marriage for some time past (although I had no notion it would be within our power to marry so soon), and if you ask my opinion on the subject, I say that it had better be—never!"

Alexander Macpherson, although his mind was of a low and narrow order, still did love Christine Norreys in a measure, and fully imagined that she loved him. At any rate, the idea that she would draw back at the last from fulfilling her engagement had never struck him for a moment; therefore, it was with no small degree of excitement that he dropped the hand he was pressing between his own, and said hastily—

"Christine, you are joking—you cannot possibly be in earnest."

"Indeed, I am," she answered quietly. "I would not think of joking upon such a serious subject; and it is because the subject is such a serious one, Alick, that I dare not trifle any longer with your heart or my

own. The constant disagreements which take place between us, and on the most trivial occasions, have taught me, little by little, what your unexpected proposal of to-day has made suddenly clear to my mind, that we should never be happy as husband and wife."

"And this after a four years' engagement," exclaimed Mr. Macpherson, starting from her side, and pacing the room rapidly. "I think you might have told me of your intentions before, Miss Norreys."

"If I had come to know them myself, I certainly should have done so, Alick," she replied; "but I have been fighting with my doubts and fears for so long, that I had grown accustomed to the daily combat, and did not know that I was vanquished till this moment. I am sorry," she added, a few tears finding their way into her eyes as she thought of the distress she would cause him; "it seems hard to say so after so long a time, but it would be worse in me to accept your offer, and let you discover the trickery for yourself; for, when I contemplate an immediate marriage with you,

Alick, I shrink from the idea, with something more than fear—something that tells me that I do not love you any longer as I used to do."

"And to what do you attribute this sudden change?" he asked, sarcastically.

"It is not sudden," she answered, earnestly, "it has been the growth of years. I see it now, although my eyes were not fully opened to the truth until you spoke to me to-day; but now I feel that we have been labouring under a great mistake, and that if we wish to prevent ourselves being miserable for life, we must draw back before it is too late. Indeed, Alick, I must say it—once and for all—I cannot marry you."

"Thank you for the compliment," he returned, with far more anger than sorrow in his tone. "I know to whom I am indebted for your change of mind, Christine, if you do not. I have seen the influence which your brother's wife has had over you ever since she entered the Lodge. I have not misinterpreted her constant covert sneers at my country and countrymen, and her at-

tempt to make things unpleasant for both of us, by drawing you away for secret conferences, and depriving me of your company. I can see plainly enough that the influence and advice of Mrs. Raymond Norreys is at the bottom of this decision on your part, and I am only sorry you should have suffered yourself to be led away by such an evil counsellor. A woman who has disgraced her husband's family by a shameful flight——"

"You shall not speak of Rachel in that manner in my presence," retorted Christine, firing up in defence of her absent sister; "and you entirely mistake in imagining she has had anything to do with, or even is cognisant of the decrease of my affection for yourself. It has been your own temper, Alick, and that alone, which has parted us. If my determination not to link my fate with yours is a source of distress to you, you have to thank yourself for it—your suspicious jealousy of all my actions—your utter want of self-control. It has been this, and this alone, in you, which, little by little, has killed all my love, by first de-

stroying my respect. How do you imagine that I could, with any degree of confidence, place myself under the guidance of a man who cannot guide himself; who, in his want of self-management, is a perfect child? What esteem could I have for such a husband? How could I look up to him? And without esteem, Alick, there can be no lasting affection. When a woman has once felt contempt, she may forgive, perhaps, but she can never again feel love."

"Then you mean to say you despise me?" said Alexander Macpherson, every Scotch hair on his head standing up, and every Scotch drop of blood in his body boiling over, at the insult thus offered through him to his sacred country, by a mere Englishwoman.

"I despise those phases in your character which I have alluded to," replied Christine, mournfully; "but not you—no, Alick, though I cannot be your wife, I shall never forget, however long I may live, that I once hoped to be so."

But Mr. Macpherson was too irate and insulted at her answering his question in

the affirmative at all, to be able to take any notice of the qualification which the latter part of her sentence shed over the commencement. He seized his hat and stick, and prepared to leave her.

"Good-bye, Miss Norreys," he exclaimed, as he did so; "I hope you may always feel as satisfied with your own conduct as you appear to do at present."

"But, Alick," she said, "do not leave me like that; I wanted to speak with you, and to part with you as a friend. It is not right that people who have loved as we have should separate in anger. I have spoken for your good as well as my own. I have——" but the rest of her sentence remained unfinished, for Alexander Macpherson had refused to listen to it, and had left her, almost shutting the door in her face. Then Christine did shed a few natural tears. A woman cannot so easily part with an old and intimate association; and although she felt that she had done right, and would not have recalled her words if she could, she would have wished to separate from her lover in a more peaceable

spirit; but the thought that if he had really loved her, and really felt their separation, he would have shown more of sorrowful surprise, and less of temper, struck Christine as she wept, and had the effect of drying her tears as she rose, imbued with the conviction that it was much the best as it had happened, and that she was very glad it was over.

But Mrs. Norreys appeared to take a different view of the case. Christine was rather a matter-of-fact girl, and when she had once made up her mind to do a thing, she did it, and therefore it was with plenty of determination and an air of perfect calmness, that she walked up to her mother's room, when her interview with Mr. Macpherson was concluded, and informed her, in a very few words, of the change in her prospects; but Mrs. Norreys' sense of propriety was horrified at the sudden rupture, and her lamentations over, and objections to the plan were without end.

"Well, Mamma," exclaimed Christine, at last, rather testily for her, "it's of no earthly use regretting it now, because the

thing is done, and not to be undone. I have no regrets on the subject myself, excepting that I did not come to the same decision long ago, which would have saved me a good many tears, and all of us, trouble. But thank Heaven! that I have been enabled to see my danger before it was too late. I might have married from the force of long association, blindfold. I have had a great escape."

"But the disgrace, Christine," her mother urged, "and the publicity of such a thing! You do not seem to remember that. What will the Macphersons say? and your own friends who have known of your engagement all along? I am sure, I shall be ashamed to show my face out of doors soon. What with Lady Norreys' behaviour, and now yours; we shall be the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood;—we, who have been remarkable for never making ourselves conspicuous before." When her mother relapsed into one of these whining moods, Christine was apt to become a little impatient with her.

"What can it possibly signify, Mamma,

what people say or think, in comparison with the happiness of my life? Would you have had me risk that, in order to prevent idle gossip, or put a stop to rumour. Do you think women, like Rachel and myself, in taking the most important steps of our lives, can stay to be actuated by the fear of what our neighbours will think of them? Do they so stop to consider us? And if they did, I should be the first to say they were fools for their pains. We may be mistaken in our ideas of what is the best thing for us to do. Rachel's last act may prove a wrong move, so may this one of mine (though I doubt it), but even if they do so, our lamentations will be for ourselves and our own ruined happiness, not for what our friends think upon the subject. Let them think—let them talk—let them *kill* themselves with talking," continued Christine, in the energy of her indignation, "I for one, will never stir a jot out of the path which my sense tells me is the safest to pursue, for all the tittle tattle of London."

"But for your own sake, Christine," still whined Mrs. Norreys. "You should have

been careful to consult your friends before so hastily breaking an engagement of such long standing. Just fancy—for *four* years you have been known to be engaged to Mr. Macpherson, during which time you have wasted the best part of your girlhood (you will be three-and-twenty next birthday, Christine), and spoilt perhaps a dozen chances of settling yourself, and who do you think will propose for you now? It goes greatly against a young woman's chances, Christine; men don't like a girl to have been engaged four years to another person previously. It turns them off, it's a great drawback. I should not wonder now, if you never marry at all. It's a great pity that you could not have arranged matters better with Mr. Macpherson. Every one has their faults, and I dare say a little kind talking to might have led him to see the weakness he is guilty of."

Christine's lip had curled more and more palpably as her mother's speech lengthened upon her ears. When it was finished, she said contemptuously:

"Men don't like! Who wants them to

like, Mamma? Let them keep their likings to themselves! Am I, for so paltry a reason, to link myself for life to a man whom I don't like? And what is a great pity? That I did not patch up, or do not at this moment contemplate patching up, my quarrel with Alick! First, you mistake in thinking that I have had any quarrel with him. Secondly, that if any amount of time or consideration could shake my determination with respect to not being his wife, that I should have made it known to him at all! And further, Mamma, you do me great injustice if you imagine that (although I feel a marriage with him would only make me miserable) I could calmly contemplate, in the first hour of my parting with a man to whom I have been engaged, as you say, for years, ever marrying another!"

"You do not mean to remain single for life, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Norreys, who seemed still more horrified at this prospect than the other.

"I do not know," replied Christine, quietly; "but I certainly think of nothing

else at this present moment. I know I have acted for the best; but the very knowledge that separation between Alick Macpherson and myself is the best thing for both of us, cannot fail to be a source of pain to me. If I ever marry, of course lies in the future alone. I am not old, Mamma; and the probabilities are that I shall do so; but just now, with my late experience fresh upon me, the alternative appears the most desirable lot. Anyway, whether I die wedded or unwedded, I can never regret that I refused to marry a man whom I have ceased to love. No single life, however lonely and unblest, can be so cursed, as that of a woman unhappily married. And I think, Mamma, if more girls thought as I do on this subject, there would be fewer miserable wives in this world. Rest contented in the knowledge that (notwithstanding the painful scene I have gone through to-day) I am at the present happy; and as long as I have no worse trouble than the want of more blessings than I possess (instead of the want of less curses), you may thank

God for the peace of your daughter's life."

And Mrs. Norreys, with the experience of sixty years upon her, felt humbled as she listened to the words of wisdom which proceeded from the mouth of her single-hearted child.

CHAPTER XI.

VERY NEAR DEATH.

"CECIL, you are surely not so crazy as to think of *bathing!*" exclaimed Lady Frances Morgan, as her lover entered the breakfast-room with a very suspicious looking bundle in his hand, which he immediately thrust out of the door again, and upon the hall table.

"Why not?" he replied. "It's a lovely morning, and as warm as a toast."

It certainly was so for the time of year, for one of those autumnal suns had risen upon Brighton which do occasionally, in this climate, cheat us into the belief that summer is not quite gone, and make us accountable for very foolish actions, which we have sometimes reason to remember and regret afterwards.

"So it may be for a walk," pouted Lady

Frances; "but it will be frightfully cold in the water."

She looked very pretty in the lavender dress which she had assumed in compliment to the Cravens' mourning, as she spoke; but not sufficiently so, apparently, to deter Major Craven from his whim, for he answered—

"Cold! I wish you'd try a good swim against the tide on a day like this, Fan. You wouldn't call it cold, then. It's precious hot work, I can tell you."

"Well! I can't try a good swim, and so I don't know anything about it," rejoined Lady Frances, who had set her heart upon a morning stroll with her *fiancé*, and did not admire having to change her plans. "What are you going to do, Lady Norreys?"

"I don't know," said Rachel, lifting her heavy eyes to Lady Frances' face. They had finished breakfast, and she was sitting by the window, watching apparently the passers by.

"Won't you come for a walk on the pier, or shall we ride? We can do so very

well without Cecil; and I want to explore some of the surrounding country. It is just the morning for a ride, so beautifully warm," for the window was open, and the air circulating through the apartment. "Who are you watching for—the postman?"

The colour flew violently to Rachel's face as the unpremeditated shaft hit her hard. The fact is, she was watching for the postman, although she would hardly have acknowledged it to herself, and would sooner have done anything than had it thus sharply brought home to her by others. Ever since she had received that letter from Christine (which she had answered without mentioning her husband's name), she had almost, without her own cognisance, watched for the postman. She had risen each day with an unnamed hope fluttering in her breast—a hope which had continued there to flutter, by slow degrees to fail, and then to die, as morning succeeded to afternoon, and afternoon to evening, and the several postmen passed their door, or stopping, left letters for every one but herself. She had hoped, unknown to herself, that

the sister (from the enthusiasm with which her own letter was written) might strive to influence the brother in her behalf, or that Raymond himself, in the desolation of their enforced separation, might feel the want of the love he had once rejected at her hands, and write a few short words to tell her so. However few, however tardy, so they breathed regret, Rachel in those days would not have scorned them. The hunger which had raged in her own heart (since the night which might have reunited them for ever—but had only served to separate them further), had grown to be so great and so continuous, that she would have snatched for satisfaction at the smallest crumb of love that Raymond deigned to throw her. She was not vehement now—the passion and the force seemed spent together; she was simply numbed—numbed to every outward thing, but conscious herself of a gnawing, never-ceasing pain, which dwelt about the region of her heart, and would not cease for effort or for argument, and yet to heal which, she had no balm to call her own.

As Lady Frances' random question struck her ear, Rachel rose from her position near the window, and tried to answer it cheerfully. She did not affect a gay or careless manner, for it would have been as much beyond her power, as it would have been unsuited to the circumstances through which her family had lately past.

"I am quite ready to go either for a walk or a ride, whichever you prefer, Frances," she replied; "but I must wait until my mother comes down stairs" (for Mrs. Northland had not been well the last few days, and had lain in bed later than usual). "Unless, indeed," Rachel continued, with a smile, "Cecil finds, when it comes to the point, that looking at the sea is sufficient enjoyment for this weather, and returns to escort you himself."

"Cecil is not likely to do anything of the sort," rejoined her brother, preparing for his start, "so you must be each other's cavaliers for this morning, ladies. *Au revoir!*"

"By-the-bye," he continued, re-entering the room (it was a custom of Cecil's always

to reappear for a last word), "who do you think I encountered when I was at the Court, Rachel?"

He meant when he had gone there to conduct her father's funeral, for only a week had elapsed since that time.

"How can I tell," she said colouring, for her husband rushed into her remembrance, but then she added, "unless, indeed, it was Elise."

"That's it," he replied, laughing, for Major Craven never treated the subject of Mrs. Arundel, except with the keenest satisfaction at the recollection of her late defeat. "Norreys and I were having a smoke together, and had strayed outside the gate, when who should I see but my Lady Arundel, all frills and furbelows, sauntering along the king's highway."

"Did you speak to her, Cecil?" demanded his sister.

"Speak to her, Rachel!" he replied, in the greatest surprise. "What do you think I am made of? I should think not, indeed, nor did she appear to wish to give me the opportunity, for she turned and ran before

the enemy's flag. And what is better still, hearing that Laburnum Cottage was in the market again, and the widow desirous to get rid of it at any price, I sent Andrews to the landlord and bought the lease of him. I intend to install my bailiff there for the future—we'll have no widows settling themselves just under our noses, whether we wish it or not. Will we, Fan?"

"No, indeed," said the prospective mistress of Craven Court, as she thought of how nearly its owner had been lost to her by the machinations of the widow under dispute.

"So I hope we have seen the last of Mrs. Arundel," said Cecil, in conclusion, "and now I am really and truly off."

He left the room as he spoke, and soon after they saw him walk carelessly along the sunlighted cliff, as he made his way towards Kemp Town.

But he had not gone far, before he saw the back of a figure leaning over the palings on the opposite side of the road, which struck him as familiar; he crossed at once, and in another moment had clapped Sir Raymond Norreys on the back.

"Why, Norreys!" he exclaimed, "what the deuce are you doing here; or being here, why are you not in my mother's house? It's a lovely morning, isn't it? Where have you sprung from?"

The face of Raymond Norreys appeared very careworn and restless, as he turned round to answer him.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am here because I do not know what on earth to do with myself; I feel so restless. I am infinitely miserable, Craven, and that's the fact."

He looked the words as he spoke them. His sister, Christine, had said to him only the night before:

"Where are you going to now, Raymond? You will wear yourself out, rushing about in this manner, and taking no rest;" and he had affirmed that he had an engagement, or given vent to some equally convenient fiction, knowing all the time, however, that his intention was to go down to Brighton, to be on the spot where she was, to breathe the same air, perhaps to see her as she passed. For the heavier portion of his

business accomplished, and the novelty of his altered fortunes, gone, as Raymond Norreys' wife, so Raymond Norreys, found himself unutterably wretched and alone. As Rachel chafed beneath the slow march of the weary hours, as she hungered and thirsted for a word or look from him she loved, to tell her she was not altogether lost to him; so Raymond chafed and fretted, longed and pined, and could find no diversion in pleasure, or forgetfulness in active employment. And this restless hunger had brought him down like a love-sick maiden, to try and find a satisfaction however sorry, in gazing on the windows of the house she dwelt in, or watching the door from which his yearning eyes hoped to see her issue.

But anything like a confession of misery or hopelessness, from the light-hearted, reckless, bravado spirit of Raymond Norreys, fell with such strange earnestness upon the ear of Cecil Craven, that he felt quite affected by it.

"My dear Norreys," he replied, "I can see you are, but I believe it's all your own

fault. In your way, you know, you are as deucedly proud as Rachel is; and until one or other of you gives in, this sort of thing will go on. And yet, I believe, that if you were just to summon up pluck to walk into that house, and say two words to her (I know it's not your part, old fellow, but she is only a woman, you know, after all, and we must humour the creatures sometimes), that she'd fall into your arms, and it would be all right. She is quite as wretched as you are, and that's the truth."

"Are you *sure* of it?" replied Raymond, a gleam of hope lighting up his eyes as his friend spoke. "I did not feel it so keenly at first, Craven, having so much to occupy me, but the last few days I have been nearly mad with thinking of her, and the cause of our separation."

"I am sure of it," said Cecil. "Here, just walk on with me, Norreys, and I'll tell you all about her."

Then the two men commenced to stroll together in the direction Cecil had chosen, and he told his friend so much about Rachel's lassitude and despondency, and nervous

anxiety, that poor Raymond's step grew lighter with each sentence uttered, until he almost seemed to walk upon air.

"All you have to do, is, to bring down your pride to make the first advance to her," concluded Cecil; "but I won't swear to the upshot of an interview with her otherwise."

"I'll do it," exclaimed Raymond. "I'd kneel to her, Craven, if I thought she really cared for me. I'd humble myself to any degree; I'd——"

"Well, well, my dear fellow; you need not let all Brighton know your honourable intentions," said Cecil, laughing at poor Raymond's ardour. "You come and bathe with me first, and we'll settle the other matter afterwards."

"Bathe!" exclaimed Raymond, opening his eyes. "Why you don't mean to say you are going to bathe to-day?"

"Indeed, I am," said the other, "why, the water will be as warm as possible with this sun upon it. You'll come, too, won't you?"

"Not I," replied Raymond. "I've had

too much salt water forced on me in the pursuit of duty, to make me care to tumble in it, this sort of weather. I expect you will find a little of it go a long way, Craven."

"Not if you were with me," he replied; "I've heard so much of your swimming exploits, Norreys, I wanted you to give me a few examples of the same."

"Ask me six months' hence," laughed Raymond, whose spirits had risen in a most extraordinary manner during the last half hour. "I believe I am considered rather a good swimmer, but I should think the sea this morning, would be enough to chill anyone's ardour."

And it appeared as though the populace were of Raymond's Norreys' opinion, for when the two men arrived at that part of the beach, whence Cecil purposed to bathe, there was not a soul within hailing distance, and all the machines were drawn up on the shingles, with their doors locked.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Cecil, impatiently, "I shall start from here then."

"Better not Craven," was the reply, "you'll be fined before you know where

you are. Wait a minute, and I'll knock up some of the people belonging to those baths."

There was a line of buildings labelled "Baths" within sight, and Raymond Norreys having applied there, learnt that all the proprietors of the machines were away, and the machines themselves, laid up for the season.

"You see, there ain't many as apply for them at this time of the year," added his informant, who was a superannuated sailor, "at least, not at this end of the beach, and so it isn't worth their while to stay about with them; but that's my boat you see there, and my lad can handle an oar, and so if the gentleman likes to have himself run out a bit, he can, and bathe from the boat's side."

"You had better give up the idea for to-day, Craven," said Raymond, when the former, on hearing the proposal, expressed his willingness to acquiesce in it; "it will be very cold, bathing from a boat."

"I don't care a fig about the cold," replied Cecil, who was rather obstinately inclined when he had once got a notion in his

head; and the old seaman strengthened his determination by remarking that—

"'Twas a beautiful day to be sure, and a beautiful sea; and he didn't think as the water would be so cold as it had been the week before, and they had had plenty of bathers about then. 'Twas only last Monday as the machines were drawn up," he concluded by asserting, "and they never would have done it, if they could have guessed there'd come such a change, but it was a change to be sure, and would the gentleman please to have the boat," &c., &c., &c.

And the gentleman would please, and so the little craft was launched, and the lad, a boy of fifteen or thereabouts, jumped into it, and took his seat.

"Take an oar, Norreys," shouted Cecil, as they prepared to push off from the shore.

"Thanks, I'd rather not, if you can manage without me," returned Raymond.

A moment afterwards he was sorry he had said so; a moment afterwards (Cecil having only thrown him back some laugh-

ing rejoinder as he seized the other oar himself) Raymond regretted that he had not gone with his friend—that he had not been subjected to a little more persuasion. But the fact was, he wanted to be alone with his own thoughts for a while; he could hardly believe yet, that what his brother-in-law told him was true—that Rachel was really fretting at his absence and pining for his return. If so, what happiness!—what bliss!—what ecstasy, was in store for both of them! But the idea was so new to him; he had been bemoaning her indifference for so long, and of late had so determined within himself that her own assertion to the contrary was false, that he could not all at once take it in, as he wished to do; and, therefore, to be alone with this fresh delicious hope was company—the best of company—to him, and he wanted to indulge himself by a few minutes of solitude before he sought her presence. And yet he was sorry that he had not accepted Cecil's offer, and gone in the boat with him. He could not understand why (for fear was a stranger to the breast of

Raymond Norreys), but the regret returned more than once, surprising him each time, the knowledge struck him, that it was there again. In the meanwhile, he cast himself upon the beach, and dreamt of Rachel. The sunshine certainly felt very warm there, and was inviting, although it had not the power to lessen the deep colour in the fingers and noses of some half-dozen little children, who, with their nursery-maid, were all the human creatures within sight of him, for the superannuated sailor had retired again to his chimney corner, and the boat was no longer within hail. As Raymond lay upon the beach, his cigar between his lips, and that happiest of dreams warming his heart's blood, he remarked how soon the distance widened between him and the sea, and how fast the tide was running out.

"If Craven means to bathe this morning, he had better do it," he thought, as he marked the rapid progress of the waters; "he will find it heavy work swimming back against this tide."

The boat had made some distance by

this time, and he could see Cecil standing in it and undressing. He tried to holloa out some words to him between his closed hands, to the same effect as the channel in which his thoughts were running, but his efforts were ineffectual, although his action did not pass unnoticed; Cecil Craven shook his head merrily at him, and the wind brought back his words upon the shore, and scattered them. So then he lay down on the shingles again, and resumed his smoking and his train of thought. The nursery-maid, meanwhile, with her charge, all eagerness to watch the exploits of the gentleman in the boat, stood near him, gazing.

Raymond had remained inactive for another ten minutes, when he was roused from his reverie by an exclamation from the girl beside him.

"Look, sir! he's gone—the gentleman's gone!"

"Eh! what did you say?" said Raymond, carelessly—"gone. Ah! yes," fully thinking that she had watched the first plunge into the sea on Cecil's part, and become excited in consequence.

"He ain't coming up again, sir. Look! look!"

This time she touched his arm, and Raymond raised his eyes in the direction of the water. There he saw, what made him start to his feet with a loud exclamation, for the lad was standing in the boat, with every appearance of being greatly alarmed, as he waved his oar and his woollen cap alternately, and then gazed over the side, evidently not knowing what to do.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Raymond, appealing to the excited girl beside him. "Where is he?"

"Please, sir, he's gone down!" she answered. "I told you so. I seed him jump ever so many minutes ago, when you was thinking. He swam a little way out, and then his arms went up, and he went down, and he ain't come up since?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Raymond. "*Cramp.*"

He had been divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat as the nursery-maid spoke, and now threw them in a heap upon the beach.

"Look after my clothes," he said, hurriedly. "My watch and purse are there; and tell some one, girl, if you can;" and without further thought or direction, Raymond Norreys strode into the shallow water up to his knees—up to his middle—deeper — a little deeper still—and then there was heard a dull plunge, and he was striking out manfully to the rescue of his friend.

It was easy swimming out, for the heavy tide was running fast, and one huge wave but bore him to its crested top, to toss him into the arms of another. Raymond Norreys had not exaggerated his own powers; he was both an able and a gallant swimmer, and he had the courage of a young lion. As his well knit muscles did their work surely, each stroke brought him nearer and nearer to the side of the boat; but as soon as he gained it, the lad hurriedly directed him to a spot some distance further on.

"He went down just there, sir," he almost screamed. "It wasn't my fault, indeed. I can't swim, sir, or I would have

gone after him. I'm a deal nearer than I was when he sunk, but I don't see signs of him nowhere."

But Raymond had not stayed to hear half the frantic speech. His practised eye, accustomed to the sea, had spied something on before him, which, to the inexperienced, might have seemed a log, or a mass of floating seaweed, but which he knew to be a human head, and struck out for it. But even as he neared it, it disappeared again, and when it next rose, had been carried far away on the fast receding tide. Again he went on, cleaving with powerful strokes the buoyant waters, never thinking of his waning strength, never calculating on the chances of his own return, whilst a hope remained of bringing that indistinct something before him, back to shore.

The nursery-maid had stood staring after him for some minutes after he had entered the water, crying with her excitement and her fear, whilst she admired the prowess he displayed; but then the idea seemed to strike her, dull as she was, that the boldest swimmers sometimes do not

return to shore, and under this new dread she deserted her little charges.

"Now, Mary Ann, you just stay along of Charley and Jane and the rest of them, whilst I run to the baths;" and without further preamble she was off.

Once clear of the mass of hard, unyielding shingle, so difficult to tread swiftly, and beyond the beach, her task was easy. Above the overhanging cliff, and on the thoroughfare, a dozen voices and a dozen pairs of hands answered at once to her call for help, and in another five minutes a second boat was launched and manned, and proceeded rapidly, under the strokeof four oars, to the place of the accident, whilst a little crowd collected on the beach to watch its progress, to all of which in turn the nursery-maid related the alarming incidents she had witnessed, acquiring quite an importance in her own eyes from the eagerness with which the various questioners assailed her, and the desire they each expressed to keep her conversation wholly to themselves.

And meanwhile the boat was ploughing the waters, and now had reached the other.

"They are on a-head," shouted the lad, as soon as they were within hail. "He's got him, and turned. They're coming this way."

"And why haven't you steered to meet 'em, stupid?" was the reply he got. "What good do you expect to do looking at them?" And then to one of the men—"Do you see 'em, Tom?"

"Just a-head of us," replied the other.

"Now, mates, all together," and the boat resumed her course. But the next moment the same voice exclaimed--

"Steady, there! they're down!"

Yes! it was true. He had struck out to the relief of Cecil Craven encumbered by his shirt and heavy trousers, had gained and rescued him (as far as supporting the senseless form, so much weightier than his own, above water, could be called a rescue). And then Raymond Norreys had turned and attempted to swim back against that cruel tide, in support of that heavy burthen, and having reached so far, had failed. First, his muscles had performed their office slower, and he had drawn his breath labo-

riously; then sensation had in a measure deserted him, and he could not any longer feel the grasp he still rigidly maintained upon that inanimate body. And lastly, his own head had become giddy, and his arm, unconsciously to himself, had relaxed its hold, and his limbs had failed, and Raymond Norreys knew his hands were empty, and that he himself was sinking. And then the heavy waters closed over his eyes and ears and mouth, and he knew and felt no more.

"Steady, Tom—a little more to this side —that's it; gently, lads, gently—there's another yet. This here's the one as was bathing. That's right, Bill, lay 'em down there, and keep their heads raised whilst we make the best of our way home. I doubt but what the dark 'un's gone, if the other ain't, too. Cover them up with these coats. Well, the Lord preserve us all!"

And in profound silence (some of their party having volunteered to help the lad home with the other boat) the men rowed back to shore, although the shout which

arose thence, as they lifted the bodies from the water, showed them that their benevolent action had been watched, and appreciated.

"And now where shall we take them?" was the inquiry which simultaneously arose from several voices, as the boat was hauled up by friendly aid, and grated on the shingles. At first no one answered. The shed of the Humane Society was at the other end of the beach, and no efficient aid was near.

"To the baths," suggested a voice in the crowd.

"But they ain't got no blankets there," said a second.

"Here's the doctor," exclaimed a third, as a professional man, who had heard of the accident from a witness above, pushed his way into the assemblage. He walked up to the bodies of Cecil Craven and Raymond Norreys, and lifted the fallen eyelids with his thumb.

"Who are they?" he demanded shortly.

"I don't know the dark one," replied one of the boatmen, "but the tallest is Major

Craven. He's often about here in the summer-time."

"Does he live near?" was the next inquiry.

"Quite close, sir—at No. —, in the Parade."

"Then carry them home at once; they both breathe," was the decisive order. "I will go forward and prepare the family for their arrival. Policeman, keep the crowd off."

And starting upon his errand, he was closely followed by the sad procession, carrying the bodies of the two young men, covered with sail-cloth.

Rachel and Lady Frances had not gone out riding or walking after all, and were still sitting at the dining-room window (now closed), whilst Mrs. Northland reclined in an arm-chair near the fire; for the fictitious beauty of the morning had proved evanescent, and the sky had already resettled itself into its November shade of grey.

"What can all these men be doing?" exclaimed Lady Frances, as the cavalcade

first met her eye. "Look, Lady Norreys, they are carrying something between them —is it a man?"

Rachel, quicker to see things than Lady Frances, instinctively guessed the truth.

"Oh, don't watch them, Frances," she said, shuddering; "I dare say it is some poor drowned creature that they are taking home:" and at that moment the doctor's knock sounded at their own hall-door.

Then there commenced a hurried colloquy in the passage, in which the surprise expressed by the woman of the house, was so soon blended with exclamations of horror and tears of commiseration, that Mrs. Northland grew alarmed, and rushed out of the room to learn what was the matter. The girls were about to follow her, when the landlady entered, and essayed to stop them.

"Pray don't go, my dear ladies, it isn't a fit sight for you—it isn't, indeed. Ah! poor dear gentlemen; and to think it should happen so soon after the other, and in my house, too. Well, they always say one death makes three."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" screamed Rachel, as, followed by Lady Frances, she darted past her into the passage, just in time to see her poor mother faint in the arms of one of the servants, whilst a crowd of wet and dirty men were blocking up the narrow staircase.

"Oh, what is it?" vociferated Lady Frances. "What are they doing? who is hurt, Rachel? who is dead?"

But Rachel did not need to ask information of either herself or others.

"*Cecil*, Frances!" she gasped. "Drowned! Oh, poor Mamma!"

CHAPTER XII. AND LAST.

HEART TO HEART.

But Cecil was not drowned, and in a short time their fears respecting him were lulled to rest. For before Mrs. Northland had entirely recovered from the death-like swoon into which the news had thrown her; by the time that she had staggered to her feet again, and, putting those aside who tried to stay her steps, had expressed her determination not to be kept from the presence of her son, the doctor bore down upon them with the glad intelligence that for the present they might lay aside their anxiety on Major Craven's behalf, for he had opened his eyes and spoken, and was already on the high road to recovery.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Mrs. Northland, and then she added, though apparently with an effort, "and the other?"

"The other gentleman is not yet conscious, I regret to say," replied the doctor, but he breathes more freely, and there is every hope that our efforts" (he had by this time been joined by a brother practitioner) "will eventually be as successful in his case as in that of Major Craven."

"The other!" exclaimed Rachel; "what other?"

She had been so occupied with reviving her mother since the account of the accident reached her, that she had had no time to make further inquiries, and had believed, until then, that her brother was the only sufferer. Mrs. Northland knew who the other was (for she had seen both the inanimate bodies as they were carried up the stairs), so had Martha Wilson, who was now by her mistress' side, but they neither of them dared to mention the fact to Rachel, and as they hesitated, the doctor, who was a stranger to them all, and had no idea of the connection between the lady

before him and his patient, settled the question by saying—

"Sir Raymond Norreys; at least so I understand his name to be from the servants."

"Raymond," shrieked Rachel; "my husband!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Northland, too late, to the doctor; "this is Lady Norreys."

"I am very sorry," he commenced, looking awkward the while, but Rachel waited for no apologies. Straight from the room she went, like an arrow from a bow, despite all entreaties from her mother or Lady Frances, and scaled the staircase to the upper regions. Mrs. Northland attempted to follow her, but fell back upon her chair, as she tried to walk.

"Go with her, please," she said, with quick entreaty, to the doctors. "Give her all the hope you can, she is very young;" and then as the medical man disappeared to execute her wishes, she sunk back upon her cushions and addressing Lady Frances, said:—

"Oh, Frances! is it possible, we are to

have another loss? I think all this grief will be the death of me!"

But Rachel heard nothing of this. Swiftly and silently as she had sped from the lower room, did she enter the upper one, where Raymond Norreys had been laid. It happened to be the first she came across, —the same one on the landing where her father had so lately died. As she entered, she saw another stranger, together with some servants, busily occupied near the bed with hot blankets and water-bottles; a man who, ignorant of her ideality, looked up jealously from his occupation, as she crossed the threshold, and authoritatively warned her off again.

"My dear lady, you must leave us, you must indeed. We are doing all that is necessary for the case, and it is no sight for you."

But paying no heed to his words, she walked straight into the room. Then the other doctor followed her, and having whispered to his friend who she was, they said no more, but permitted her to have her way.

"I *must* see him," was all she had whis-

pered, as she advanced towards the bed. Her voice was so determined, as well as her manner, and there was such a tone of low excitement running through her words, that, however much their ideas of propriety may have been shocked at the action, the medical men instinctively retreated a little from the side of their patient, and allowed her free access to him.

Yes! there he lay! her Raymond! her beloved, whom she had parted from in anger, but so short a time ago. There he lay, every vein in his body, showing leaden colour through the clear dark skin; his eyes half-opened with a look that made her very soul recoil—it was so like death; his lithe, muscular limbs lying nerveless, rigid, and motionless by his side, and on his naked breast, suspended from a black ribbon, a tiny locket (even in that awful moment, Rachel recognised and remembered the far-off time she had given him the childish trumpery toy), with all its gilding worn off, and a lock of ruddy chestnut hair curled round one side of it. As she stood and gazed upon him (though but for a

moment), every tear dried in her eyes, whilst the hot fever came on upon her face and made them shine, with a false, unnatural brilliancy. She did not regard the presence of the doctors or the servants; she felt no shame, no reserve, in that dread hour; she only saw before her, as she thought, her dead! and with a hungry eager cry, Rachel threw herself upon the marble body, and burying her face against his, impressed kiss after kiss in rapid succession upon his eyes, his forehead, and his mouth.

But here one of the doctors interposed:

"Forgive me, Lady Norreys, but we cannot possibly permit this. You forget that the patient's life is at stake, and if you wish our endeavours to be successful, you will leave us to pursue them alone."

At these words, Rachel raised herself at once from the body of Raymond. She felt ashamed that she should have so suffered her feelings to overcome her prudence, and horrified to think that she might even have imperilled by it, that precious life. She turned to the medical men, as they resumed their efforts, and said hurriedly:

"I do not know who you are, gentlemen, but I thank you for reminding me of his danger. For God's sake persevere in your attempts, and do not leave off until you have recovered him. And Heaven bless you for them, whether you succeed or no. I am rich," she added, passionately, "but I do not wrong you, by supposing that that knowledge will increase your energy; although it can, and it shall, in any case, abundantly reward you; but if you save his life," she continued, with pleading pathos, that almost amounted to a cry of agony, as she clasped her hands together, "I will pray for you—God knows I will—to the very last hour of my existence. You *can*, you *will* save him; will you not?"

Her eyes were flashing like jewels now, as she seized one of the doctors by the arm, and her very soul seemed hanging on his answer.

"We are doing our very best, Lady Norreys," he answered, gravely, "and we have, under Heaven, every hope of success. See how much more freely Sir Raymond

breathes even now! You can best help us, my dear lady, by praying for a blessing upon our endeavours."

She did not speak to him again; she only took one more hurried glance at the dear face looking so free from all earthly passion, in its awful stillness, and then stole silently from the room.

Outside the door she encountered her mother, whose eyes asked the question which she dared not put into words.

"Better," replied Rachel, in low, measured tones—"a little better; he breathes. How is dear Cecil now?"

"Quite conscious, Rachel, though feeling weak, and anxious to see you. He is infinitely distressed about poor Raymond, for it appears that it was in the effort to save your brother's life that he has so nearly lost his own."

Cecil was nearly recovered, and only too willing to talk of the danger he had gone through, and to laud the courage and intrepidity of his friend, by which he had been rescued.

"If Norreys dies," he said several times

during that afternoon, "I shall never hold up my head again."

But Norreys did not die. Half-an-hour after Rachel had seen him, he was pronounced to be in a fair way to live, and she was eager to be allowed to go to him. But this, Dr. Sherard (who had been summoned to his aid) would not hear of.

"Sir Raymond is excessively weak," he said, "and must be preserved from all agitation. We have not yet told him even where he is."

But as hour after hour went on, and still she was not admitted to his room, Rachel grew impatient. She waylaid Dr. Sherard, and attacked him upon the subject. She was longing to be near him—employed in his behalf—taking trouble for him. Now that he had been so nearly taken from her for ever, and in so noble a cause, Rachel felt as if she never could do enough to signify her gratitude and love to him.

"Not allowed to go to my husband?" she urged; "it is rather hard, Dr. Sherard, and when even the servants are allowed to pass in and out."

"The presence of servants can have no power to agitate Sir Raymond, Lady Norreys. I cannot say as much for yours. Besides (I grieve to tell you so),—but I do not think an interview with him would be productive of any pleasure to you just yet; because he has been very feverish all the afternoon, and a little delirium has set in—a passing weakness, doubtless, that will be gone with the morning, but, under the circumstances, it is best he should be kept perfectly quiet."

"Delirious—good heavens! Dr. Sherard, is he in danger?"

"Certainly not at present, Lady Norreys, and, in the meanwhile, let me entreat you to keep your own mind quiet and at rest."

At rest! How easy to say so—to advise so! Rachel crept up to her own room after this little interview with the doctor, and, groping her way in the dark to the bedside, fell on her knees there, and remained so. Cecil was up again by this time, and seated in the arm-chair by the fire in the dining-room, being petted and made much of by his mother and Lady Frances, whilst

he, who had rescued him from so dreadful a death—who had been the means of his sitting there ever again; he—her darling—her soul's darling—her lover—her Raymond (Rachel disguised none of her feelings from herself or others now), had recovered his consciousness only to lose it again; had been resuscitated only to fall a prey, perhaps, to a wasting fever, such as her first father died of, which should sap all his strength and energy, and cut him down before her eyes by slow degrees. For Rachel was so miserable that she took a savage pleasure in making the worst of the case. So her mother found her an hour afterwards, when she crept up-stairs to see what had become of her daughter, and to ask her why she did not join them in the warm, cheerful room below. But Rachel would not move out of the dark or the cold. They were congenial to her present state of feeling.

"Leave me alone, mother," she said, "it is the kindest thing you can do. I feel until something is decided about Raymond, that I shall neither care to eat or sleep."

Dr. Sherard had not exaggerated the position in which Raymond Norreys lay; on the contrary, he had made lighter of it than he thought, in order to avoid alarming his wife. For the fact is, he was for some time after that, in great danger. The unusual excitement and fatigue which he had gone through for a fortnight previous to his immersion, and during which period he had taken very little food, and scarcely any rest, had ill-prepared his frame for the call which had been so suddenly made upon its powers. And to this reason was attributable, the tendency to fever which he displayed as soon as animation was restored—a tendency, which before long resolved itself into a severe attack upon the brain,—under the influence of which Raymond Norreys hovered between life and death, till it seemed a lottery which should claim him. By the next day, indeed, Dr. Sherard was enabled to fulfil the hope he had held out to Rachel that she should then be admitted to her husband's presence, simply because he was so insensible to all outward objects, that it could not signify who attended on

him, so that he was carefully and continuously watched. By the next day, a hospital nurse was installed in his room, for he had shown symptoms of becoming violent, and his mother and sister had been telegraphed for, and were staying in the same house,—Mrs. Northland thinking that she never could make enough of the mother, whose son's life had so nearly been given in exchange for that of her own child. By the next day, Cecil was walking about the house again, eager to do anything he could, to mitigate the suffering his wilfulness had been the means of entailing upon the whole family, and so anxious and heartbroken about the state of Raymond Norreys, that he had no time even to make love to Lady Frances, which defection on his part, that young lady (having recovered her own spirits) resented accordingly.

By the next day, little was heard about the house, which sorrow had for the second time so unexpectedly visited, but the whispered conferences which were continually taking place upon the staircase, and the harsh discordance of the sick man's voice,

so strangely altered by delirium, as he gave vent in loud terms to the dictates of his disordered fancy; or sadder still, when his unnatural laugh, which made one shudder to listen to, rang over the upper-landing to the hall below.

But what of Rachel?

She was no longer to be found sitting in her usual attitude in idle thought, and gazing from the windows; nor yet thrown down by her bedside praying with tears and unuttered groans, and hands feebly outstretched into the darkness. She could not bear any longer to remain with folded palms communing with her sorrow. It had become too great a grief for that; had she done so, she would have gone mad. She would not even stay to receive comfort from her mother or his; she would put away from her, Christine's pitying kiss; she would fly from the sound of Cecil's or Lady Frances' words of attempted consolation. They meant it kindly—only too much so, but had she given in to their desires, they would have driven her wild. No! while that unearthly laughter was pealing through the house—

while those unmeaning words followed her wherever she went—she could not remain quiet; she would have died if they had forced her so to do. Days succeeded days, and still the cruel fever continued at its height, and still the delirium was unabated, and so were Rachel's strength and energy. In and out of that sick-chamber she crept; but she was generally inside of it, administering to his wants; giving him food or medicine; cooling his hot head with vinegar and water; or gently sponging his hands and arms. Often she would sit by his bedside for hours together, his hands clasped in her own, whilst he would ramble on to her, in what might almost (so far as its intelligibility went) have been reckoned an unknown tongue, of scenes in which he had mixed, actions which he had done, and events which he had long before forgotten, and which only returned now, that he might torture his poor mind with the attempt to recollect them perfectly. He never seemed to know her; he called her by every name but her own—that he never mentioned—but his eyes would follow her

light figure as it moved about his room, and his grasp would detain her by his side till she nearly dropped from fatigue, and when she left him, he would murmur in a plaintive tone like a fretful child, and she would be back in a moment, ready to replace his head (where he evidently liked best to lay it)—on her bosom. She did not stop to ask herself once, what might be the issue of all this; she could not, dared not look beyond the present; and if a thought of the possible future ever loomed upon her mind, Rachel put it from her, with a shuddering horror, and only told herself that whatever happened, her place was here—her heart, her hope, was here; and that she and she only, must nurse him, and live or die, according as he lived or died. The old hospital nurse, who did not see such charms in her patient as her employer did, was used to wondering during her moments of relaxation where "that poor creature, Lady Norreys, got her strength from, for she had never been in bed, to her certain knowledge, since she had entered the house, which was a fort-

night come Tuesday, and nursing the gentleman up-stairs wasn't like ordinary nussing either, for a more refractory bit of flesh she never came across, and she'd nussed a many in her day."

But Rachel gained her strength from a source of which the hospital nurse, in her "ordinary nussings," knew nought; from a source that never wastes, that never fails, never runs dry—the inexhaustible fountain of a woman's love.

But a day came at last when Raymond Norreys was pronounced conscious and out of danger. A joyful, never-to-be-forgotten day, when Dr. Sherard announced the news publicly to the assembled family, and was received by a glad shout from Cecil, a flood of tears from the women of the party, and by Rachel (that morning, for a wonder, at the breakfast-table) with a sudden flushing, a deadly pallor, and then a blind stumble forwards, as if she was groping her way in the darkness.

"She is fainting!" exclaimed Mrs. Northland and Mrs. Norreys, starting to her aid.

But she recovered herself almost immediately, and attempted to smile at them.

"No! I am not," she said, with difficulty. "I am only stunned with happiness! Oh! Dr. Sherard, may God's richest mercies be yours for ever!"

And as she spoke, she took the kind doctor's hand and pressed it to her lips. He, looking down upon her fragile figure, her large careworn eyes, and tremulous mouth, and recalling all the devotion he had seen her display during the last fortnight, felt infinitely moved.

"My dear lady," he said, "thank Heaven for your husband's life, not me. I have been able to do very little. His own excellent constitution has been his best doctor; but I trust now that he may be spared for many years to reward you for all your devotion, for I have seldom seen greater. But I must leave you now and go to him. I should prefer your not entering his room at present, as any great agitation might bring back the delirium, and we must have no relapses;" and saying so, he left them alone to talk over his good news.

Mrs. Northland folded Rachel in her arms as she congratulated her, but Mrs. Norreys was almost too agitated to say much.

"May God's blessing be on you!" she began.

"Oh! no!" exclaimed Rachel, while she caught the hand uplifted to her head, and pressed it to her heart instead; "no, dear Mrs. Norreys, don't say that, because I do not deserve it. I love him now as *my life*," she said, vehemently; "but I did not do so always, and I have made him very unhappy (oh! I dare not think now *how* unhappy). I have allowed my pride to step between us in all our little differences, and prevent the possibility of a reconciliation; but I have been bitterly punished for it. Oh, mother! Oh, Christine! can you, will you, forgive me, for the little care I have hitherto taken of a heart so dear to you? For, indeed, I love him now!"

"There is small need to tell us that, dear Rachel," replied Mrs. Norreys. "Whether the fault has been yours or Raymond's, we will trust that all the misery attendant on

it, is over now and for ever, and that the sad trial we have just passed through will carry before it every recollection, but that of the wifely virtues it has called forth in you. And now, my love, you had better retire to your own room, and try and procure a little rest, before you are permitted to return to his side, for I am sure you sadly need it."

Even in a moment like this, Mrs. Norreys could not quite lose sight of her habitual prudence, and Rachel, unwilling to thwart her, and accompanied by Christine, professed to do as she desired. But it was an anxious, restless time for her, until she was told that she might once more seek his presence. Two hours afterwards the permission was her own. Dr. Sherard had prepared the patient's mind for her reception, by telling him gently where he was, and how he came there.

But Raymond Norreys, after so long an illness, was not like the same creature that, full of hope and ardour, had leapt into the waters to rescue the brother of his wife, the trying fever having wasted his energy

and powers of recollection. All remembrance of his interview with Cecil, and the bright future he had anticipated then, had been swept away before the confusion of delirium, and he was conscious of nothing now but a great despondency, consequent upon his extreme weakness. He lay feeling half dead, half alive, and wholly careless of what was before him, as Dr. Sherard broke to him a knowledge of the circumstances under which he came there, and the people by whom he was surrounded. He simply told him that his wife was one of them, and wished to see him. He did not dwell upon the fact that she had nursed him throughout his illness. Why should he? He left that tale of love for her own lips to mention. And then Rachel was informed that the way was cleared for her, and that she might reseek her husband's presence when she chose.

Quietly, almost timidly, upon receipt of it, she crept downstairs again, remembering as she did so, with a sudden pang of what was almost fear, that she had not seen him conscious since *that night*.

When he had fondled and caressed her hand and laid his head upon her bosom, he had been insensible of who she was. Would he—ah! was it possible he *could* look coldly or indifferently, even angrily, upon her now? As Rachel surmised it, creeping down the bedroom staircase, she turned cold and leaned against the wall for a support. But his door was open, and she could hear his nurse contending with him about some medicine which he had apparently refused to take. Dr. Sherard was gone again, and they were alone. He had always been used to take his draughts from Rachel's hand, and she fancied that even in the midst of his ravings, the touch might have become familiar to him.

"Well, you *must* take it then," she heard the nurse say, "for the doctor was most particular in his directions that you was to take 'em every hour, and it's the proper time. Come now, do take it like a good gentleman." And then Raymond appeared to object again, for she added, though in a lower tone, and more to herself than him, "Well, I wish your lady was here, for any-

one so tiresome, for opposition and contrariness, *I* never came across."

Then Rachel darted into the room, and approaching the woman, took the glass from her hands.

"Give it to me," she whispered, "I will give it to Sir Raymond; you can go, nurse."

"It's the fever draught, my lady, and he *must* take it," was that worthy's final remark as she disappeared (infinitely glad of the release) to the kitchen quarters.

Then Rachel summoned up her courage and tried to steady her trembling limbs, as she carried the medicine to the bedside.

Raymond Norreys was lying on his back, vacantly staring at the ceiling. He was terribly changed, and looked more so, now that the excitement of delirium was past. His hair had been cut close to his head, his eyes were dull and sunken, his frame was wasted, and all the bright appearance of his youth seemed gone. When he caught sight of Rachel, his thin cheeks flushed and his eyes brightened, but he did not express any surprise at seeing her there. He was

too thoroughly languid and weak to feel any strong emotion; besides, since the doctor had apprised him of his situation, he had lain quiet, trying to collect his thoughts, and some of the past had come back to him, like an old story might do, that we have forgotten entirely, until we take the book up again. But Rachel, knowing that agitation might be very hurtful to him, tried as she caught his eye, to speak indifferently, in order that she might not excite him. Yet how her heart yearned to fold him next it, in a strong embrace.

"Raymond," she almost whispered, in her effort to be calm, "this draught must be taken, Dr. Sherard said so. You must take everything that you possibly can now, to get up your strength."

"I don't want it," was the childish, fractious answer, as he tried to turn his head away. "It's of no use taking a lot of medicine."

"I am sure you will do so if I ask you." Her eyes were fixed upon his, the while, and as she raised him from the pillow, and

held the glass to his lips, he drank it off at once.

"I'm awfully weak," he said, as he sunk back upon his pillow with a sigh.

The ready tears welled into her eyes, but she tried to keep them from running over.

"You will soon be strong now, Raymond, if you take care of yourself."

"It was touch and go, wasn't it?" he said, presently. "I made certain, at one time, it was all over for both of us."

She was afraid of his dwelling on the horrors of that drowning scene, and tried to change the subject.

"Never mind that now, Raymond; it is all past, thank God. Your life and his have been most mercifully preserved. You should be very thankful."

"What for?" he demanded, turning his face towards her.

"Oh, Raymond!" she cried, her tears refusing any longer to be restrained, "you have been in great danger since that. For the last week we never thought you could have lived, but you have been brought through it. Is that *nothing?*

"But I don't care to live, Rachel," he replied, using her name for the first time; "I would rather have died."

She was too much pained to answer, and he saw it.

"I would rather have died," he repeated vehemently, a full recollection of the past pressing on him as he spoke. "I would rather have died in the water, or here, or anywhere, than rise up from this bed to go through the same suffering again, that life has hitherto brought me; for there is for me no living, Rachel (to be called such), without your love," and he turned his head away again as he spoke.

Then her lips quivered, her eyes refilled, her whole face lighted up with a yearning sympathy—a deep, uncontrollable love—a passion that beat down pride beneath its feet, and would not be silent any longer.

"Raymond," she cried, "my love! my husband!"

He heard her, and he turned—turned with eyes through which his soul was beaming like a bright light flashing through a window pane.

"Rachel!" he said.

He did not ask if it was true—if she was certain that she did not deceive him or herself. He did not question for how long she had loved him, or wonder when the change had come. He only saw her face, and heard her voice, and knew it, oh! happy Raymond! for himself. Then he stretched out his feeble arms into the air, and held them to her; and as Rachel witnessed the weak effort, the mighty love surging in her own breast, in one moment swept all Pride and Self-deception and false Shame before it for ever; and with the glad cry of one who has wandered long, but sees his home open to receive him at the last, she sprung forward to meet their clasp—and heart lay against heart, in one long, passionate, never-to-be-again-severed, embrace.

THE END.

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